

The Presage of Decay

Consent of the Governed, and Other Deceits, by Arthur Krock, *Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1971. 309 pp. \$8.95.*

TO SPEAK of consent of the governed and other deceits is, in strict grammar, to rank the first concept as merely one in a list of likenesses. But Arthur Krock does not really consider consent-of-the-governed an invariable deceit. Sometimes yes, sometimes, no. He has the darkest forebodings about the state of the nation and unblinking awareness of the follies and rascalities that have put it in peril. But a sunny appreciation of political foibles, a respect for fortitude when, on occasion, it is shown in public life, and what might be called an instinctual, a not quite despairing optimism, do break through from time to time.

There are other ambiguities in the volume. It follows the author's *Memoirs*, published three years ago, in reporting on some sixty years in a newspaper career that brought him four Pulitzer prizes and special eminence even among others who have served as chief of the Washington bureau of *The New York Times*. But this second book suggests, at least in the table of contents, that it started out with statelier intentions than mere remembrance. The chapter headings include "Power and its Germinals," "The Presidency," "The Congress," "The Supreme Court," "Regulatory Agencies," "The Power of the Press." Some effort to hold to this schematic structure is observable from time to time, as though the author really did aim at a kind of treatise on government. But the chapter boundaries constantly liquefy across one

another, and the didactic yields again and again to anecdote and sweet, bitter, and bittersweet character sketches—sometimes, perhaps, left over from the earlier work?

In the book as schema, Krock's judgment on the Federal establishment is suggested in the space he gives to the three theoretically co-equal branches. The Presidency gets sixty-six pages and the Congress forty, which is certainly a fair apportionment of their relative importance in 1972. But to the Supreme Court Krock allots only sixteen pages, and several of these are a mere recounting of old stories from an earlier chronicler. The author has not previously skimmed his examination of judicial supremacy in the time of Chief Justice Warren and how it made "the Bill of Rights . . . an instrument not of the *protection* of the minority but of *tyranny* by the minority. . . ." But generally in this book one senses a kind of drained and residual exasperation, as in his brief commentary on the Haynsworth and Carswell confirmation fights. Carswell was no Holmes or Brandeis, Krock agrees, but lays his failure less to "mediocrity" than to ideology. He does not mention a subtler factor proposed by James William Moore, Sterling Professor in the Yale Law School, and a Carswell backer:

We of the Ivy League—the big, prestigious law schools such as Yale, Harvard and Columbia—are often intellectual snobs. Any lawyer, judge or professor who does not have an Ivy League degree or has not taught at one of our law schools and written a law review article or a book is almost by hypothesis blessed with mediocrity. . . .

Of course Judge Haynsworth was a Harvard Law School alumnus. But the Moore deposition, like Krock's own comment, may prove relevant in confirmation debates to come. Oh, yes, and Mr. Moore's observation above about intellectual snobism reminds the reader that Krock in his chapter on the press clearly suggests that Spiro T. Agnew is not always wrong.

In his section on the Presidency, Krock regrets its steady aggrandizement, at least over Congress. Here as elsewhere he is soon away from theory and abstraction to livelier talk of personalities. Franklin D. Roosevelt thought, as had Theodore, that "the President could do anything that he deemed in the public interest, in both foreign and domestic affairs, provided only that neither the Constitution nor any statute had specifically prohibited it. . . ." "Truman is a political animal, and it was the instinct of the species that enabled him to win the election of 1948, not his strength of character, his humility and his common sense" (which Krock does not deny). "Eisenhower, the amateur, was a successful politician because he had acquired the prestige of a national military hero . . . and because his personality makes him beloved by the people." "Kennedy . . . discussed all important decisions with his father until the elder's power of speech was almost totally impaired by a stroke. But the President continued to lay his problems before his sire, watching for reactions as expressed by his father's eyes or indicated by a nod, affirmative or negative." Of course this later attendance may have been the mere morale-therapy of filia's devotion as much as an expectation of guidance.

When Lyndon Johnson was majority leader in the Senate he "showed a mastery of men, of difficult situations, and of professional politics unsurpassed by any predecessor and matched by only one or two. But once in the White House these talents withered in the blinding glare of the place and the office. . . ." As for Nixon, "in my opinion, if John Kennedy had not been so much more photogenic on television than Nixon, he would have been defeated in 1960. . . . Nixon is perhaps the most politically imbued President, even including Johnson, since Franklin Roosevelt's time. [Nixon] understands politics, he likes politics, with extraordinary deftness and perfect timing he yields the fewest concessions that 'the art of the possible' requires. . . ."

On the domestic scene Krock is rightly troubled by the labor bosses, and understands that their rule rests wholly on preferential legislation and adjudication through three decades. But he nevertheless discusses the George Meanys as though they were autonomous, masters of their own way, equipped to decide and dispose between union advantage and the public welfare. The truth is that the leftward legalism which certainly does cocoon them is as much a trap as a shield; it empowers them to exhort and agitate, to obstruct, disrupt and paralyze, to take more while giving less, but in no way at all to conciliate or concede. When they opt for "statesmanship," they raise up whole platoons of younger hotspurs scrambling for their places. Any competent observer can point out labor "statesmen" who were summarily unfrocked when detected in the advocacy of more productivity or other forms of obligation. The labor policy of the middle third of the American twentieth century simply discourages rank and file fealty to leaders who talk like management. The truth is that the unarticulated and even unconscious premise of official thinking is still class warfare. Industry remains to the legislators a jungle in which predatory ownership preys on victims only less defenseless than in the past. In the minds of its proponents the Wagner Act of 1935 was really William James' moral equivalent of war, not a formula for production but a Marquis of Queensbury code. Mr. Meany, *et al.*, are hopelessly imprisoned in the image of guerilla chieftains, from which they can be delivered only by recognition, at last, among legislators and judges that production is not conflict but collaboration. That revelation is not imminent; yet as Chairman Burns of the Federal Reserve Board has suggested, a wage inflation uncontrollable by union chiefs and beyond managerial control is the core of our own economic crisis which we have now radiated—*via* trade and the international money system—throughout the world.

Arthur Krock seems less than penetrating in his comment on the new constitutional vote for the eighteen-year-olds, and what may be expected from it. He is not optimistic and he reduces Justice Black's opinion without much trouble. But he does not fully plumb the exquisite ingenuity of this essay in self-laceration by which a people relying on an informed electorate hastens to advance the suffrage by three years in behalf of the first high school generation to come through the entire secondary curriculum with education widely subordinated to other activities—among administrators, to the logistics of chiaroscuro seating patterns in classrooms; among teachers, to picketing for higher wages. Mistaken applications of the race and labor policies converge to subvert the real business of many schools, the root processes of intelligent citizenship.

Yet on balance this book, like the earlier one, is a true bill of present perils and their causes, if not of their cures. The author does have some intricate notions about government rearrangements, but cannot really believe that mere shifts in the machinery would do much good. It is the I-was-here and he-said-to-me information, the detail on the famous and infamous of the time, that makes the work of value. Certainly, both *Memoirs* and *Consent* show why at the end of the former Krock confessed to "a visceral fear . . . that the tenure of the United States as the first power in the world may be one of the briefest in history." There is in *Consent* a convenient metaphor to sharpen the point. Speaking of the pitiless political hostesses in Washington who withdraw their invitations abruptly when statesmen begin to wane, Krock says:

However faintly this scent of decaying power comes to their nostrils, they sniff it as instantly as the predatory birds can detect their unsavory comestibles from afar. . .

The scent of decaying power is really Mr. Nixon's deadliest hazard, coming as he does

at the end of the Roosevelt-Warren *aggiorramento*, called to the receivership, as it were, of an enterprise in which he has already detected intimations of "decadence." Is there any doubt that his ultimate strategy in the White House, at the China Wall, in general, is to play for the time the nation needs to sober up?

Reviewed by C. P. IVES

"Bryan! Bryan! Bryan!"

Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan, by Louis W. Koenig, *New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971. 736 pp. \$14.95.*

THIS LATEST BOOK of Louis Koenig, professor of government at New York University, is a massive, comprehensive, scholarly account of the life and career of the Great Commoner, concisely set in the history of the times, exhaustively researched, and splendidly written. It will appeal to readers of biography because it contains much about the personal development of the man from birth to death, his thoughts, beliefs, and way of life, and the influence of family background, education, marriage and worldly experience upon that development. It will appeal to those whose experience or memories reach back to the days of Bryan's prominence on the American scene from the Cross of Gold speech of 1896 to the Great Monkey Trial at Dayton, Tennessee in 1925—a prominence which embraced most of his adult life and which transcended his political defeat and decline because of his superb oratory, his religious and political writings, and his espousal of Bible Christianity on which much of that prominence was based. It will appeal to readers of American history be-