

How Shall We Vote?

We present below some opinions of DISSENT editors on the problem of voting in November. As usual, everyone speaks for himself.—EDITORS

Lewis Coser

IN LAST YEAR'S U.S. PAVILLION at the Montreal World's Fair I noticed a sign reading:

*Hall of the Great Society
—Emergency Exit.*

Let's take that exit right now! After the obscene happening at Chicago that went by the name of Democratic National Convention this conclusion seems inescapable.

The McCarthy campaign was amazingly successful in bringing into the political process thousands of new activists whose dynamism, idealism, and ability to devote a great deal of time to grass-roots political activity gave promise that they might change the Democratic party in their own image and, by radically transforming it, take it away from the old pros. Had they realized their goals, this might well have meant a fundamental reorganization of the American party system and the emergence of a truly left-liberal mass party.

The traditional party politicians who ran the Convention under the guidance of L.B.J. decided quite consciously to oppose the threat to their domination inherent in the McCarthy movement. They indicated that they were even willing to take the risk of losing the election in order to rebuff the McCarthy forces. And, employing every weapon in the armory of the professional pol, they used force, fraud, deception, and manipulation to gain their end. The result is clear. Hubert Humphrey is the candidate of the machine, the candidate who emerges from a Convention that has decisively rejected its grass-roots support of liberal activists and relies on Southern racists, trade-

union oligarchs, traditional ethnic voting blocks, and the remnants of local political machines to elect him on a hawkish platform.

What should be our response to this disgusting performance? I can see only one. We must teach the machine politicians a lesson by showing them that they can no longer win without the support of the young, the grass-roots idealists, the doves, and the previously uncommitted professionals. Hence we should abstain from voting in the Presidential election and concentrate attention on those Senate and House elections in which liberal candidates with a clear anti-Administration record on the Vietnam War are running on the Democratic ticket. If Paul O'Dwyer receives a higher vote in New York than does Humphrey, if Gilligan in Ohio and Cranston in California also do better, this will show the pros that the liberal voters can no longer be ignored and that neglect of these powerful grass-roots sentiments will only lead to continued Republican victories. My overriding concern at this moment is to teach the Democratic party a lesson.

But I already hear the major objection that is likely to be brought forward: this will lead to the election of Richard Nixon, and this Republic will not be able to stand four years of tricky Dickie, penny-pinching, budget-balancing and neglect of all those major projects of social reconstruction which are so urgently on the agenda. My answer is twofold. Nixon is indeed a most distasteful character, and it is not a pleasant prospect to have this opportunist at the head of the state in the years ahead, but it is also a fact that Nixon is not a fascist beast. I see no reason to believe that he has any intention of dismantling the welfare

state, and neither has he the character nor can he command the social and political resources to change the overall trend of American politics set into motion during the New Deal. His would be a mean-thinking, uninspired, reactionary four years, to be sure, but they would not amount to a major structural change in the drift of American domestic policy. And as to foreign policy, I see no reason to suppose that he intends to reverse the key trends that have been developed ever since the Cuban confrontation for a gradual extension of the policy of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union. I am not reassured by the idea of having a Nixon in the position to pull the atomic trigger; in fact this possibility gives me nightmares. But then I have similar nightmares right now when LBJ is in that position.

When it comes to ending the disgraceful war in Vietnam, I see no real difference between the two candidates. Both are committed to continuing the war. And just because they both have taken this position, I cannot possibly bring myself to vote for either of them, since I believe that the war is the foremost and decisive issue that confronts us. But I am willing at least to consider the argument that a new Administration, unburdened by the vested interests that have grown over the years on the part of key decision-makers of the old, might conceivably have an easier time in ending the war than an Administration that will be bound by the same commitments and forced to use the same key personnel as the old.

But will not the Negroes and the poor suffer from four years of Nixon? Yes, indeed they will. But they will suffer under any Administration as long as the Vietnam War continues. And one would have to be unduly naive to expect that a Humphrey Administration, even after the end of the war, would engage in those desperately urgent radical measures that are required to stop the decay of our cities, the degradation of the poor, and the continued affront to the human dignity of American Negroes. Major Daley's candidate will not rebuild the American city anymore than will Senator Thurmond's.

We are in for a few very hard years, for rather desperate times. But if we can use these years to restructure and reorganize the American party system in such a way that there will

emerge from the shambles of the present Democratic party a truly liberal-radical party, then those four years in the wilderness may be a necessary evil. Without a rebuilt Democratic party, there is no hope left for liberal and radical men of good will. Let's attempt to build such a party, and as a first step let us abstain from voting in the November Presidential election. Between the cholera and the pest there can be no choice. Let us concentrate our energies on those local elections where there *is* a choice. And let us hope that men like O'Dwyer, Gilligan, and Cranston will join McCarthy, McGovern, and other liberal Democrats to help fashion a new Democratic party based, in large part, on that deserving Gideon's army that made the McCarthy movement a watershed in American political history.

Michael Harrington

AFTER having participated in the dynamic mass movements of the new politics in 1968—both the Kennedy and McCarthy campaigns—I intend to vote for a candidate of the old politics, Hubert Humphrey, even though his nomination was a triumph of the machine over the political realignment which I have worked for in recent years.

Humphrey's position on the most decisive issue of the year, Vietnam, is unconscionable. He has either been the enthusiastic booster of the horror in Southeast Asia, or else the vacillator hinting, but never quite saying, that he is a dove in hawk's clothing. On the other main question in the election, "law and order" (otherwise known as "get the blacks, hippies, and welfare chiselers"), the Vice-President had shamelessly kind words for Mayor Daley after the police lawlessness in Chicago; and his support of the war precludes him from proposing the massive social programs which are an alternative to the nightstick.

In terms of political structures, Humphrey won the nomination by relying on moderate racists, the machines, and alas, most of the labor movement. In the process, he managed to turn back a youthful reform surge which is the most exciting, and perhaps most significant, thing to have happened in American poli-

tics since the industrial workers of the CIO became an electoral force in the thirties.

The previous paragraphs do not exactly constitute a positive endorsement of Humphrey. My reason for casting a ballot for the Vice-President is, of course, straight lesser-evilism. Where there is a difference between Presidential candidates, and where a protest or third-party strategy can neither effect the present choices nor even prepare for decent options in the future, I believe there is a moral obligation to vote for the better man even though he inspires no confidence. In 1968, the middle-class puritan who refuses to soil his hands in this way is helping to condemn the American people—and particularly the black, the poor, and the young—to four years of Richard Nixon. Hubert Humphrey is clearly preferable.

In making this argument, I do not base it upon a virulent personal antipathy to Nixon. I am appalled by the sorry history of Tricky Dickery over the years, and I am hardly comforted by the soulless, opportunistic technician who proclaims himself to be the “new” Nixon. But my position is not primarily based on such personal, visceral considerations. Nixon is the political incarnation of a drift to the Right. If he becomes President, it will legitimate the forces of repression, including the police militants. Moreover, a Nixon victory would result in a Congress even more reactionary than the present one.

Even if Nixon’s economic policies are only as bad as Eisenhower’s, the resultant stagnation, unemployment and poverty will either provoke minority risings and majority terror or else it will drive tens of millions of Americans into a passive, nihilistic, corrosive despair. If, as I think likely (since the Republican party of 1968 is to the Right of 1952), Nixon’s domestic leadership will be even more catastrophic than Ike’s, the situation will be worse.

On the most crucial issue of the day, Vietnam, Nixon is the institutional leader of the Cold War party. Given the fact that the Soviet imperialist crime in Czechoslovakia has strengthened the American hawks, this could have consequences well beyond South-east Asia.

However, there is one outcome of the election even more disastrous than a clear-cut Nixon victory: an ambiguous Nixon triumph in the House of Representatives in which the

Presidency is won through a deal with the Wallaceite South. For Wallace is the nearest thing to a genuine American fascist since the days of Father Coughlin, i.e. he has a demagogic social appeal as well as the mentality of a prison guard. If his racist politics make a significant showing outside the South—and particularly among union members—that would be a blow to every democratic hope.

It is, therefore, impossible to say Tweedledum/Tweedledee. And it is reprehensible and idiotic to advocate a policy that puts the Right in power on the grounds that the consequent repression will “radicalize” its victims. In the first place, that is inhuman and manipulative, and vulture politics; in the second, it doesn’t work—as the ghosts of the German Communists of 1932–33 can attest.

But having made a rather depressing argument for my Humphrey vote, let me conclude these remarks on something of an upbeat. The Kennedy-McCarthy forces managed to win about one-third of the Democratic convention in a campaign of nine months’ duration. Indeed, they had achieved such a momentum that, had there been any alternative not named McCarthy or McGovern, the delegates at Chicago probably would have nominated him rather than the Vice-President. But that alternative did not exist.

I do not think that this phenomenon is confined to “kids” or is transitory. It reflects the growth of a college-educated constituency in which quantitative expansion may well have turned into something qualitatively new: a mass base for “conscience politics.” If that movement retains a certain cohesiveness, if it eschews fourth-party adventures and self-righteous gestures and concentrates on assembling a new majority in the mainstream, I think it can transform American politics.

Irving Howe

WE ARE ALL, in this discussion, revealing strong emotions—and not because we have clear paths to offer, but because we don’t. We are frustrated by the fact that in 1968, a moment of national crisis unparalleled since the Civil War, we should be faced with so dismal

a prospect as choosing between Humphrey and Nixon.

- Let's delimit the significance of voting. Old-time leftists, half-recalling the experience of large European Socialist parties, often think of voting as a way to register fundamental commitments: hence, they "cannot vote for a bourgeois candidate." Younger leftists look upon voting as a personal test: they would "feel sick" if they had to vote for X.

Both views, while appealing, are not very relevant to the American experience. Voting has little to do with one's fundamental programmatic loyalties, which are expressed—this is a dilemma of American radicals—more frequently in public actions and writings than through the electoral process. Nor is voting a test of rectitude. It is a way of registering a choice—if there is one—between two candidates, both of whom are likely, in varying degrees, to be unsatisfactory to radicals. If there were a significant socialist movement able to present its own candidates in more than token or ritual ways, that would be another matter; but there is not.

- To vote for "the lesser evil" *under these circumstances* can be a sensible kind of choice. Sensible, if there are differences of some magnitude; but if you have to decide, say, between a Thurmond and an Eastland, you might as well go fishing. Those who choose to refrain from voting, however, must recognize that they too may be influencing the outcome. For instance, all those who for good reasons denounce Humphrey *must* face the problem of whether their proposed abstention will help elect a reactionary Nixon Administration. You may decide that the price of four years of Nixon is worth paying in order to teach the Democrats the lesson that without liberal support they are doomed to defeat. Such calculations can't be made with certainty; but you must, if you are in politics, try to make them. For it is at least possible that the American Negroes will pay the cost of liberal-leftist rectitude in "sitting this one out" and thereby perhaps helping to elect Nixon. I don't say this is so; I do say you can't ignore such considerations.

- The best thing to have happened in American politics for some time is the McCarthy movement—the movement far more than the

candidate. Whether it will survive is a question; it would be a pity if it became no more than a shared suburban memory. My view is that for the foreseeable future the main *political* arena (which isn't at all to say, the only arena) for the liberal-left in the U.S. is the Democratic party. That's where, politically, the action is. Will McCarthy's young followers who scored impressive gains in Colorado, Minnesota, New York, and Massachusetts remain in the clubs, deepen their hold, prepare for 1972, and meanwhile fight like hell for peace candidates? Or will they fade into quick disillusion?

There are some disquieting signs of a new sectarianism of the righteous: "we have gone into holy battle, the victory was snatched from us, and to hell with it." From such sentiments, understandable as they may be, you don't create a lasting political movement.

- The main issue in the country and in the campaign is the Vietnam War. No matter how many erudite arguments Leon Keyserling produces to show that the economy can sustain both the war in Vietnam and social advances at home, the political reality is that as long as the war continues, little will be done to solve our domestic problems. The war is a poison which courses through the entire body politic, and ending it is a prerequisite for significant advances on the home front. Any politics which tries to skirt the issue of Vietnam is irresponsible. And Humphrey is the man who has most ardently defended Johnson's course in Vietnam. Recently Humphrey has made a two-faced and multi-mouthed effort to span the gap between LBJ and RFK, but everyone—friend and foe, man and child—recognizes him for the sweating opportunist he is. Nothing so far in his program or promises offers a serious way out of the Vietnam disaster.

If Humphrey is elected, the war may soon end. The same for Nixon. From the point of view of American capitalism, the war has (I think) become a liability and needs to be liquidated. The question which agitates the decision-makers is this: what shall the terms of liquidation be? how high a cost shall be paid? is it worth fighting another year or two to get a "better" agreement?

I see no clear evidence that electing either of these lovable characters would hasten an end to the war—or would prolong it. Humphrey

is almost beyond prediction, so rattled and unprincipled has he become. Nixon, untied to the LBJ past, might pull an Ike and negotiate more freely; but as a captive of reactionary anti-Communism and its constituencies, he might prolong the war and perhaps even opt for "victory." How can one know?

In regard to domestic politics there is a clear and significant difference between Humphrey as President and Nixon as President. A victory for Nixon would be interpreted, rightly enough, as a victory for "law and order," those who believe the way to solve urban problems is to crack more black heads. Nixon wouldn't dismantle the welfare state, he would simply (like Reagan in California) resist those extensions and improvements of it which are so vital. That would be enough of a disaster, for this is a historical moment in which standing still means going back. That Humphrey employs the rhetoric of welfarism, that he is bound by tradition and constituencies to the more liberal segment of the American population, that the Negroes are becoming an increasingly powerful force within the Democratic party—such reasons point to the probability that Humphrey would be more amenable than Nixon to pressures for domestic change. I say, "probability," because there are no guarantees.

If, then, the decisive weights on the political scale were domestic issues, I would vote for Humphrey. But they are not. Everything depends, politically, on ending the Vietnam War—which is not to say that ending it ensures domestic progress, it is only to say that ending it is a precondition for domestic progress. I therefore am inclined to agree with Stanley Plastrik: that Humphrey, the Uriah Heep of American liberalism, is part-and-parcel of the Vietnam disaster and that so long as this remains true, I will not vote for him.

What might make it no longer true? Only if Humphrey in effect were to repudiate the Johnson war policy. Only if he were to come out with a firm series of proposals enabling negotiations with Hanoi: e.g., an end to the bombing of North Vietnam, a willingness to consider a coalition regime in the South as a prelude to elections, etc. Then, with this not-yet-visible difference on Vietnam and the already-present differences on domestic policy, there would be sufficient warrant to vote for

him. Not with enthusiasm, as we would have voted for McCarthy; not as participants in a campaign; but perforce and with discomfort.

Even such a contingency, however, seems—at least in mid-September—most unlikely.

These are hard choices. Unless you are content with striking a pose of virtue (nothing is easier these days!) and letting it go at that, there is no evading hard choices. Let's accept them in good spirit. I don't think Dave Spitz is betraying our socialist values when he decides, with massive reluctance, to vote for Humphrey, and I don't think Lewis Coser is becoming a wild sectarian when he decides not to vote for Humphrey. These are shadings of tactical estimate. Some of us have been in politics long enough not to draw blood-lines over such disagreements. So let's keep our cool and get on with our business. For it's stormy weather ahead and all good men will want to get the ship to port.

Stanley Plastrik

WHOM TO VOTE FOR? Since Nixon is impossible for any self-respecting citizen, and "fourth party" candidacies are sterile gestures, it boils down to this—to vote for *Humphrey* or to *abstain*. As things stand now, early in September, I shall abstain, but Humphrey could persuade me to change between now and November 5. I doubt that he will or that he cares. I care, however. If he travels the "high road" of a clear stance on Vietnam (*end the bombing to end the war*) and if he eschews "law and order" demagoguery as the answer to America's domestic crisis, I'll vote for him.

But I have no illusions about this. His white-wash of Mayor Daley as a campaign starter is most unpromising. I know that a strong and perhaps even valid case can be made out for voting for Humphrey. ("Lesser evil" candidate, labor support, "do you want Nixon?" etc.) Such a case might hold for a "normal" election year, but not in 1968, an extraordinary year. American political life is undergoing a revolutionary upheaval (it has just begun, has years to run). Anyone who employs time-honored criteria for judging candidates, issues, etc., is

out of touch. We are moving toward new criteria; we must raise our standards and the demands we make upon people.

What about Vietnam? Can anyone believe that Humphrey, with *his* Vietnam record and his double-talk on the issue, is more likely to end the war than Nixon? I cannot see any sharp distinction between the two candidates on Vietnam. The fact is, the country is proving increasingly ungovernable because of the moral and emotional havoc brought about by the war. *Whoever* becomes President must consider this. Is there any serious reason to believe that Nixon, precisely for this reason, would not terminate the war on the best available terms within a few months of his election? And that, having no ties with the Johnsonian past, he might conceivably bring this off easier than Humphrey? One thing is sure; the war cannot go on in its present form. Can one seriously think of Nixon escalating it? Remember, Nixon intends to be President for eight years; if the war were to go on indefinitely, he'd end up like Johnson, repudiated

To me, the one reason to elicit a vote for Humphrey is that at least, he is a human being with human faults and weaknesses. Garulousness, flatulence, political-liberal opportunism, etc.—well-grooved characteristics for American politicians. Nixon, on the other hand, is like those plastic credit cards or delegates' badges that flashed green when inserted into one of those Chicago convention machines; he simply isn't human. But again, the extraordinary nature of the year 1968 precludes what might legitimately be a basis for voting.

Despite these discouraging signs, one ought not to draw overly pessimistic conclusions from recent events, particularly the Democratic convention. Amid all the noise and confusion, a new kind of national politics is clearly on the march; it is forming within the disorderly ranks of the Democratic party and a multitude of other groups, many of which have strong local roots at present. New leaders are appearing; their numbers are bound to increase. Can anyone believe that Mayor Daley has a future, or that *he* represents the future? (*Incidentally it ought to be clearly stated at least in one place that Johnson, not Daley, bears responsibility for Chicago, particularly the police episodes. This embittered man, knowing clearly who had*

toppled him, was having his last innings with the youth. A word from him would have halted the police.) The avenue for action is within the Democratic party and the thousand turbulent eddies that swirl about it.

David Spitz

I AM TEMPTED TO SEEK reassurance in an ancient adage: that history is not really determined by the passions, purposes, and personalities of the powerful; that what counts far more is contingency and external circumstance, traditions and social forces. But the searing impact of two national nominating conventions does not allow to believe this. The nominees and their parties, their ideas, even their wrong ideas or lack of ideas, their sincerity or guile, their sense of commitment, more importantly the character of that commitment—all these suddenly matter; they matter very much. And so I am driven back to the elemental—to who and what these men and parties are, what they have been, what they are likely to do, and how one who finds himself in the role of dissenter should respond.

Clearly, he does not begin by bemoaning the fact that he cannot choose between good and evil, between a man of conscience and one of ambition, between a party of principle and one of expediency. Were such a choice normally available to him, he would not be a dissenter. He must begin, instead, with the grim recognition that he can select the lesser evil or suffer the evil that someone else will select for him. Nor can he escape this dilemma by raising the cheerful specter of a fourth party. Such a political party is not a feasible reality in 1968; it lacks the leadership, the money, the organization, and the capacity to overcome state laws that will keep it off the ballot. Even more, save for some of the antiwar groups, it cannot now mobilize the elements that are required to make such a party viable. Labor, the blacks, and the poor, for example, are unlikely to bolt the Democratic party to which they have long been committed. Were such a party nevertheless to be formed, its con-

sequences in the immediate situation might well be disastrous; for just as Strom Thurmond and Henry Wallace combined in 1948 to deprive Harry Truman of votes that would otherwise have gone to him, and thereby almost threw the election to Thomas Dewey, so a combination of George Wallace and a fourth-party candidate might well take enough votes away from Hubert Humphrey to give the electoral victory to Richard Nixon.

For those who see no important difference between Humphrey and Nixon, this is no calamity. Nor will it disturb those who are determined above all else to punish the Democrats for their refusal to nominate Eugene McCarthy, or for their high-handed and near-tyrannical mismanagement of the National Convention, or for the disgraceful conduct of Mayor Daley and his brutal Chicago police, or for the shameful failure of Hubert Humphrey to speak out in condemnation of these repressive tactics.

But to one who, like myself, believes there is a considerable difference between the two candidates, and between a party that can actually be disgraced by such conduct and a party that would indulge (as it repeatedly has indulged) in such conduct with aplomb, the matter is not so simple.

I distrust and cannot abide Hubert Humphrey, but I loathe Richard Nixon. Hence I shall, in all probability, and with no little reluctance, vote for a man I dislike in order to avert the horror of being governed by a man I despise.

There is no need to explain here why I feel as I do about Nixon. His past and present bespeak a record so devious and vile that none but our Babbitts can take him seriously. The trouble is, there are all too many Babbitts.

Humphrey might have been a different man than he is. But ever since he discovered in 1952 that he could not hope to secure the Vice-Presidential and ultimately the Presidential nomination without the support, or at least the acquiescence of the South, he has waged a steadfast campaign, not in behalf of civil rights, which had brought him a deserved prominence, but in behalf of "respectability."

In the course of this sad pilgrimage he authored the Humphrey Communist Control Act of 1954, which lumped together a varied group of people and read it out of the human race. It did not do what it professed to do: it did not

outlaw the Communist party but fostered the illusion that it had done so.

It was promulgated at the very moment when history demanded not an abject surrender but a bold resistance to the earlier Senator McCarthy.

Inevitably Humphrey became a servant of the Crown, forgetting that in a democracy there is no Crown. Whether he did or did not share President Johnson's increasingly distorted views on Vietnam, did or did not share Johnson's opinions and policies on other issues, some wise, some otherwise—we may never know. It does not matter. Whatever his private opinions may have been, they were not uttered; like a puppet he recited only the thoughts of his master. So to demean one's individuality, is hardly a recommendation for the Presidency.

I am confronted then with two dismal candidates, several major issues, and a political direction or tone. What, short of a self-imposed exile, am I to do?

If the war in Vietnam is the primary issue, as it is, neither Hubert Humphrey nor Richard Nixon is the man to end it, though end it they probably will. Not because it is their idea to end it, on sensible terms; and not because they see that war as a political blunder or a moral shame; but because they will have come to believe that public opinion will no longer tolerate its continuation. This is one reason why they are, perhaps, to be pitied even as they are condemned. They are not minds but mouths, and they mouth only what they hear and repeat what public opinion says.

Now there is a sense in which this role satisfies the democratic theme. Leaders *should* respond to the changing tides of public sentiment. But there is another sense in which this role demeans the democratic idea. Leaders should give vent to the American imagination, should grasp the unarticulated but deeply felt urgings of the community, should anticipate and express the public will even as that will is discovering itself. Neither Humphrey nor Nixon possesses the intellectual depth and sensitivity to meet this greater requirement.

BUT ON THE major domestic issues of our time—the plight of the cities, the Negro and the poor, the Negro and student rebellions, the quality of our educational systems and our cultural life—there is, I believe, a signifi-

cant difference between the two men and, by and large, between the two parties. Nixon would balance the budget and insist on "law and order." By these he means cultural regression, a continuation of unmerited and debasing poverty and urban blight, and that conception of order which seeks to suppress the manifestations of discontent rather than to remove its sources. Humphrey will strive for some amelioration in these areas. Here if not in Vietnam he can be expected to move with some strength and determination, for it is to the disadvantaged groups in these areas that he and his party are most beholden. I do not suggest he will do exciting things—but he may avert disaster or even that perpetuation of our present discontents that will make for continuing misery. These are scarcely exciting prospects, but they offer the possibilities that disaster might be averted and that pressures might subsequently be exerted to move him, as they moved Johnson, toward a more imaginative and constructive program.

This brings me, finally, to what I have called a difference in political direction or tone. It is a truism, but one that ought not to be forgotten, that we live today in a period of rising expectations as well as of achievements and that only a strong national government can provide the leadership and the means necessary to their attainment. Nixon and his party are the captives of an age-old past. They do not speak, because they do not understand, the language of modernity. They see the very government they seek to conquer and employ as an enemy rather than as a servant and friend. And to the degree that they will use it, as despite their rhetoric they will, they will make it an instrument of the upper and upper-middle classes. Politics, as Alexander Hamilton and Herbert Hoover taught them, is primarily the economics of "trickle-down," the sociology of "we fortunate few," the psychology of tranquility.

Humphrey and his party, outside the South, have at least moved into the present century. In the tradition of Jefferson and Franklin Roosevelt, they seek to extend the binding force of "the common," of what unites rather than divides men. They look to government to change, even if not too drastically, the inequitable pyramids of power, status, and income.

Hence they sense, even if they do not fully understand, the needs and rightful claims of the blacks and the poor. They are even able on occasion to talk to the artists and writers, the intellectuals and the young. After all, a political party that still has room for a Eugene McCarthy and a George McGovern, a John Kenneth Galbraith and a Julian Bond, is a far different breed of animal than one that is contemptuous even of a Lindsay or Rockefeller.

And so I return to where I began. Humphrey's cause is far from noble. But Nixon's cause is an abomination.

Dennis H. Wrong

AT LEAST since 1938 when, at the age of fourteen, I read Sinclair Lewis's now forgotten novel *It Can't Happen Here* describing the coming to power of an American Hitler, I have been listening to continual forecasts of the imminence of American fascism from various groups on the Left. Most of them seemed to me to be perverse or hysterical, stemming from ideological rigidity or wish fulfillment: the popular Marxist view that fascism is capitalism *in extremis* was an instance of the former, and various versions of "the worse it gets, the better it gets" or "*nach Hitler uns*" (echoed by so many New Leftists today) exemplified the latter. During the Joe McCarthy years some liberals and radicals became badly frightened, but, despite bureaucratic inroads on civil liberties, McCarthy and his imitators were exploiting frustrations with their source in international politics rather than domestic conflicts; and therefore passions only rarely exploded into overt violence.

The present situation is quite different, and for the first time I find myself frightened and gloomy about the immediate future. The Left surge that began in the late 50's with the victories of the Southern civil rights movement has clearly spent itself; and a reaction against further change and innovation has set in at a moment when the Left has succeeded in creating new issues, changing the political atmosphere, and achieving a few of its more concrete and immediately realizable objectives.

All this has happened before in democratic politics, most recently in the late 40's and the 50's with the waning of the New Deal and the replacement of Nazism by Communism as the totalitarian rival abroad. Many of us who came of political age just before that period failed to realize that the movements and causes we identified with had already lost political momentum, just as many of the younger student militants today have yet to perceive that they may be in at the end rather than the beginning of something.

It would be depressing enough if all we had to face was a reenactment of the political rigidities and complacencies of the 20's or the 50's with Nixon or Humphrey cast in the role of Harding, Coolidge, or Eisenhower. But I'm afraid we may be in for something a lot worse: the racial conflict, the assault on lower-middle-class and provincial values by the young, from the hippies to the New Left, and the violence that has attended these, have aroused intense fear and antagonism in too many people. A mood of vengeance, wider and deeper than the desire of Republican politicians to pay back the long-successful New Dealers, is spreading and cutting across party divisions, as the support for Wallace and Daley's police indicates. It looks as if "there is a shitstorm coming" as Mailer, reacting largely to the war in Vietnam, prematurely predicted a few years ago.

From the standpoint of world peace and ending the war in Vietnam, one may find reassurance in the fact that the present turn to the Right has its roots in domestic tensions rather than in international conflict. I doubt that there will be any revivals of the bomb-rattling of Goldwater's 1964 campaign, and either Nixon or Humphrey is likely to prove more able and willing to end the Vietnam War than Johnson, committed as he is to his own disastrous policies. To be sure, the brutal Soviet suppression of Czech liberalization also contributes something to the reaction against the liberal-radical drive in America, particularly when so much of the New Left is indifferent to the fate of Czechoslovakia. But essentially it is the whiff we are getting of a "cold" civil war that is disturbing about the present state of the country. We democratic socialists have often in the past few years been called by the romantic revolutionaries of the New Left the equivalent

of "nervous nellies" (when not something worse) for opining that their politics of confrontation and disruption would in the end arouse the anger of the majority and encourage the Right to adopt similar tactics. I wish I could believe that we had been too timid and faint-hearted about the opportunities for successful political action resulting from such tactics; but I fear that we are now about to reap the whirlwind.

Neither a Humphrey Administration, nor—less certainly—a Nixon Administration, is likely to be a powerful agency of repression and reaction, anymore than the Johnson Administration has been at home. But neither candidate seems capable of winning the strong allegiances or producing the inspirational rhetoric that could quiet the turbulent spirits loose in the land. The dialectic between protests and demonstrations in the ghettos and on the campuses, on the one hand, and white backlash and police bullying on the other, is likely to speed up. And, so many past precedents in Presidential politics having been overthrown in 1968, a Reagan or a Wallace may loom very large by 1972 after the incapacities of the next Administration have become evident.

It seems to me almost impossible for the Left to regain the initiative in the next four years. Yet in 1968, perhaps for the first time since Roosevelt ran for a second term in 1936, there were in Kennedy and McCarthy two candidates for the Presidency with large and passionate followings who gave promise of initiating real and long overdue changes in American society. If Kennedy had not been murdered, he would, I think, have won at Chicago. Humphrey is a decent, able man, but in tactics, rhetoric, and personality, if not always in policy, he has been a conventional American politician; and his capacities to innovate, inspire, and draw new men to him have been deeply compromised by his term as Johnson's Vice-President and the lackluster way in which he won the Democratic nomination. And anyway, it looks as if Nixon will win the election. I can sympathize with all those on the Left who prefer to sit this one out. For myself, I shall vote for Humphrey but without illusions, as a strictly private decision, making no effort to persuade others to do likewise or questioning the different options they may choose.