

# REVIEW and OUTLOOK

## The 'New Populism'

At some enchanted moment during the Wisconsin primary, Senator George McGovern became a populist. Both he and Governor George Wallace, assorted sages now tell us, are anti-establishment candidates. Thus if the Senator wins the Democratic nomination, a UPI dispatch predicted, and Governor Wallace mounts no third-party campaign, "it may be that he will have generated a lot of opposition votes which will ultimately go to McGovern."

It's a truly startling change of image, considering that only yesterday Senator McGovern was hero of the anti-war brigades, champion of those who think Governor Wallace appeals only "to the worst instincts," and all in all the candidate of the liberal salons in Washington and New York.

Well, perhaps not so startling if you've noticed—there's no particular reason you should have—that those salons are themselves on a populist kick. A Village Voice editor and Lindsay-Kennedy speechwriter have even produced a book about it, "A Populist Manifesto, The Making of a New Majority," by Jack Newfield and Jeff Greenfield. The book is worth a look, for if it does nothing else it instructs us on some of the problems Senator McGovern will face trying to force a new majority of the little man and the chic left.

What's worth a look, that is, is not really the book, an old-fashioned polemic about breaking up General Motors, seaking the rich, etc., etc. Rather, it's the review of the book in New York Magazine by James Q. Wilson, chairman of the government department at Harvard. Professor Wilson concludes that "Newgreenfield," as he unceremoniously christens them, can't be serious.

"In Forest Hills, New York and in Pontiac, Michigan," Mr. Wilson writes, "whites do not think that the most important question of the decade is whether General Motors is one giant company or five nearly-giant companies or whether Carter Burden's money is confiscated by a 90% estate tax. They think that the most important issue is whether housing projects with poor black tenants will be built in their neighborhoods and whether white school children will be bused into distant black schools."

The book, Mr. Wilson notices, does not talk about civil rights or welfare,

and says very little about foreign policy. The authors "want to redistribute wealth but do not say from whom it will be taken (except rich people who die) or to whom it will be given and how. They wish us to think about economic matters and stop being 'paranoid' about race, but they say nothing about whether and how we are to open our suburbs and our schools to blacks. They are prepared (at last!) to face up to the problem of crime, but their first and major proposal is to take guns away from the people whom they are seeking to recruit for their coalition."

To be fair, Senator McGovern's populism rings a bit truer than the pure salon variety. A perusal of his senatorial record, for example, finds that he voted against stronger gun control, at least in a year he was running for reelection from South Dakota. His appeal to blue collar voters in Wisconsin stressed nothing like breaking up GM or better television, but opposition to high taxes, always a real issue.

Even so, Senator McGovern's populism will face the same strains as the Newfield-Greenfield variety does. What position on busing, for example, is the Senator willing to take in trying to garner those "opposition votes" Governor Wallace stirred up? Is the college kid who evaded the draft somehow more moral than the working-class kid who was drafted and sent to Vietnam? If taxes are to be lowered and inflation stopped, can we afford vast and expensive new programs for welfare or medical care?

Such questions can be ducked in writing a book, or in campaigning in a state that's always loved anti-establishment politicians, whether Bob La Follette or Joe McCarthy. But the questions cannot be ducked indefinitely, or even from now to November. So if Senator McGovern really is to pick up those "opposition votes," his image-changing is only begun. And since needed changes would undercut the base of support that put him in the race to begin with, that much of the change remains unlikely despite the suddenness of the new populist cast.

More likely, the experiment with populism will ultimately demonstrate that whatever else may upset the little man, one of the sharpest sources of his alienation lies in the prescriptions of the intellectual-moralistic establishment from which Senator McGovern has drawn his chief support.

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