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CRITICISMS OF "WATERGATE" LINE

The analysis of Watergate ~~from~~ made by the Challenge editorial is revisionist. It follows a long line of revisionist "two-center" theories of the state. Although the conclusion drawn in the editorial is correct, the analysis tends to contradict rather than support the conclusion. While the article states that "all bosses are equally bad", the emphasis on "two centers" paves the way for a theory of greater and lesser evil imperialists, on the Chinese model.

The emphasis on "two centers" appears reasonable not because it is strongly supported by the facts (it isn't) but because it appeals to ideas popularized by liberals and revisionists. As we pointed out in RR III, revisionists always overestimate the mechanistic, "purely economic" side of history and underestimate the political. Hence they are given to elaborate theories of splits in the ruling class, secondary contradictions, the "ultra right" etc. They fail to see the importance of ideology -- and the ideological point is precisely that the ruling class needs and encourages the "two centers" approach to maintain the facade of democracy.

This particular theory is borrowed from Kirkpatrick Sale's article in N.Y. Review of Books. Sale is a liberal/revisionist in the Carl Ogelsby tradition. He has just published a book on SDS which argues that an originally promising organization was destroyed by the "parasitic" PLP. The book was glowingly reviewed in UR by Steve Halliwell, another long-time anti-communist. The most overtly revisionist parts of Sale's analysis were trimmed off to give the version which appeared in Challenge. For example, Sale argues that the "old money" was opposed to the war in Vietnam, and was planning to withdraw in 1963 when JFK was shot. LBJ, representing "new money", took over and began the war. This of course is poppycock. But so is the rest of it.

The theory makes no economic sense. As Who Rules America points out, the supposed "hawk" and "dove" or "new" and "old" corporations are controlled by the same banks. The "independent" corporations can't hold a candle to Rockefeller et al, let alone steal their government from them. The "new" and "old" money are interdependent. They have the same interests in imperialism, wage controls, racism. Why should they differ on policy?

In fact, there are no significant policy differences. Neither Sale's article nor Challenge pointed to any which bear scrutiny. Detente with China? Nixon approves. Wage controls? Nixon used them before and will use them again -- it's not a principled division among the rulers. Racism? Nixon provides the crude version while Harvard's liberals work to put a gloss on it. Cambodia? The Senate is engaging in shadow-boxing just like it did over Vietnam, never really forcing the issue. Where is the major difference to justify such a titanic power struggle? Goldwater said bomb Vietnam, LBJ did it. McGovern said end the war in 90 days, Nixon did it. And so it goes.

The personnel lineup makes no sense either. Goldwater is supposedly a new money man. Yet he has been quoted repeatedly as very unfriendly to Nixon, even suggesting impeachment. Connally is a new money man. Yet Connally favors controls which are supposed to be an "old" money policy. Mitchell is named as a "wall Street lawyer" yet he is at the very heart of the "new money" plot to seize control.

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If the "new money" really backs Nixon, where is it now in his hour of crisis? He can't even get people to come to his fundraising dinners. Virtually nobody speaks up in his defense. This time last year he was rolling in money and endorsements. Now he has become a political leper. Old and new money alike are scrambling to dissociate themselves.

On the other hand, if "old money" opposes Nixon, why didn't they lift a finger to defeat him last year? (Through elections -- its the American way). Rockefeller et al looked on calmly while McGovern was demolished. Obviously, the facts suggest a quite different theory from the "two centers" idea. In fact THE SAME PEOPLE who put Nixon in power in '72 are destroying him in '73. The newspapers are a clear indication of this. Last year the majority endorsed Nixon. Yet now it is the "free press" who are most sharply attacking him.

I think a better theory would run somewhat as follows. The ruling class generally favored Nixon in '72. There are lots of advantages to a two-term president -- stability, continuity, etc. But they miscalculated. Nixon's landslide and subsequent arrogant, dictatorial approach created vast numbers of bitterly disaffected people. The ruling class realized that this posed a real threat to the credibility of the system. They saw a need to re-establish faith in the balance of power. This is the real purpose of Watergate. They aren't worried about political favors to Bebe Rebozo or ITT. (ITT is "Eastern" money anyway). That's peanuts. The problem is Nixon and his thugs lack vision, "statesmanship" -- they're giving the ruling class a bad name. Abusing the CIA etc. Horrors. So -- after he has done their dirty work for them -- they are unceremoniously dumping him. He will be a scapegoat -- just as they jettisoned other faithful servants like Joe McCarthy, General Lavelle, etc. Nixon will be crucified for the sins of the ruling class, and they will be redeemed. Faith will be restored in the free press, the independent judiciary, the balance of power, Mom, and apple pie. The whole ruling class, not just one section of it, will be the gainers.

Of course it's true that there are many ramifications, tactical conflicts within the ruling class, and so forth. We need to study these. But picking up secondhand revisionist theories won't do the trick.

Jon Harris, N.Y.C.