

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Perot's Legacy

"The Party Crasher" by Theodore J. Lowi, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Aug. 23, 1992), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

When Ross Perot suddenly called off his extraordinary independent presidential campaign last July, his many followers were angry and disappointed. Yet the feisty Texas billionaire, asserts Lowi, a Cornell political scientist, still performed a great national service: His campaign (which at this writing may yet be revived) "removed all doubt about the viability of a broad-based third party."

No matter who wins the November election, Lowi believes, 1992 may come to be seen as the beginning of the end of what he considers America's outmoded two-party system.

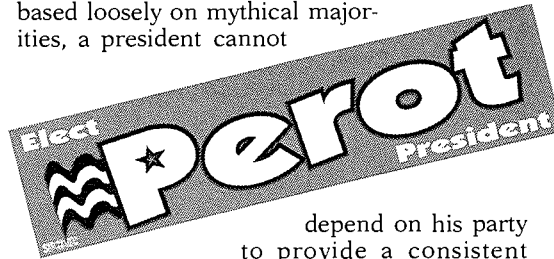
When the federal government was smaller, he argues, the Democrats and Republicans had little need to pay attention to ideology or policy. Acting as "umbrella" organizations for diverse groups, they could focus instead on political mechanics: organizing campaigns and getting the vote out. But that changed with the rise of the welfare state, a fact that became starkly evident in the early 1970s, when the postwar economic boom ended. Such "wedge" issues as welfare, crime, and taxes took on new importance—and they eventually immobilized the parties. Leaders of parties seeking majority status cannot afford to alienate many voters. So they waffled. Because leaders could not lead, the federal government could not act.

Not wanting the major policy issues settled in the voting booth, the parties sought to mobilize their constituencies with "the strategy of scandal." But that has worked *too* well: It has persuaded the public that the system itself is corrupt. Perot was the first independent presidential candidate in recent history, Lowi says, to attract large numbers of moderates disgusted with both major parties, regardless of whom they nominated. Polls last spring indicated that 60 percent of Americans favored the

establishment of a new political party.

Lowi maintains that a third party would have "a liberating effect," freeing all three parties from the need to seek, or pretend to have, a majority. Party leaders and candidates could address important issues forthrightly. Voter turnout and participation would revive.

Defenders of the current system worry that a third party could throw a presidential election into the House of Representatives. That would be fine, Lowi insists: "[A] genuine three-party system would parliamentarize the presidency." Congress would become the president's main constituency. Today, "with two parties based loosely on mythical majorities, a president cannot



depend on his party to provide a consistent congressional majority." He therefore has to bargain with members of the opposition party. If the president confronted a Congress made up of members of three parties who had been elected on the basis of clear policy positions, he could count on the support of his own party, and the third party, often holding the balance of power, could function as an "honest broker."

Ross Perot left his supporters in the lurch, but the pressing need for a third party still exists, Lowi believes. Such a party must field more than a presidential candidate and last more than one election. But a genuine third party, he says, just might be able to break "the institutional impasse in American politics."

LBJ's Secret

"Secrecy and Openness in Lyndon Johnson's White House: Political Style, Pluralism, and the Presidency" by David M. Barrett, in *The Review of Politics* (Winter 1992), Box B, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556.

President Lyndon B. Johnson often is portrayed as a scheming, secretive tyrant who cowed his own advisers into submission and insulated

himself from outside dissent on the Vietnam War and other matters. The reality, however, was quite different, argues Barrett, a Villanova

political scientist.

Johnson was at times "a difficult boss," Barrett acknowledges. Indeed, according to former White House Press Secretary George Reedy, LBJ was a "miserable" human being—"a bully, sadist, lout, and egotist." Nevertheless, Barrett says, Johnson eagerly sought out "an impressive array of advisers" who were *not* overly deferential. And he cloaked the advisory process in secrecy not just to satisfy the desires of his own psyche but to exploit his "considerable political understanding of how to achieve policy goals."

That is how Johnson made key decisions concerning the Vietnam War, Barrett says. Until just a few days before his fateful July 1965 decision to commit 50,000 more troops to South Vietnam, for example, he met with advisers who rejected the notion "that it was necessary to 'save' South Vietnam." The prediction of Under Secretary of State George Ball that the war could not be won has been widely reported, but at least five other people told LBJ much the same thing. These consultations were not just window dressing, Barrett maintains. "The best

evidence shows Johnson acting on Vietnam as he did on other issues—keeping his options open until the virtual moment of decision, all the while moving toward that denouement."

LBJ followed a similar *modus operandi* in domestic affairs. His penchant for secrecy, Barrett says, reflected a "rational, even sophisticated understanding of how leaders might achieve political and policy goals." From 1964 to '68, for example, Johnson appointed 40 task forces to develop domestic-policy proposals. Composed largely of people from outside his administration, the task forces played an important part in shaping LBJ's legislative program. But they were kept out of sight. They "will operate without publicity," Johnson told his cabinet in 1964. "It is very important that this not become a public operation." He wanted the task forces to be free to suggest unconventional ideas, without stirring up public controversy—and he wanted to remain free himself to decide which ideas were politically feasible and worth pursuing. But some of his own advisers, and many later analysts, failed to see the method in LBJ's mania for secrecy.

Farewell To Conservatism?

"The End of Conservatism" by John B. Judis, in *The New Republic* (Aug. 31, 1992), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The conservative movement that was born during the 1950s and won national power with Ronald Reagan in 1980 hardly exists any more as a coherent force, contends Judis, the biographer of William F. Buckley, Jr., and a contributing editor of the *New Republic*. Now that the Cold War is over, he says, American conservatives "have slipped back into the chaos and impotence that prevailed before the mid-1950s."

The movement emerged about 35 years ago as a powerful force, in Judis' analysis, largely as a result of the efforts of Whittaker Chambers and other conservative intellectuals, many of them ex-leftists, associated with Buckley's *National Review*. They made it conservatism's first priority to meet the communist threat to the free world, and read isolationists, nativists, and anti-Semites out of the movement. Chambers and his peers, Judis writes, "influenced a new generation of politicians led by [Arizona Senator Barry] Goldwater, and the politicians in turn mediated between the intellectuals and the general electorate." After Goldwater's overwhelming defeat in the presidential election of 1964, the conservative movement adopted fresh political strategies (such as emphasizing

so-called social issues) to win over new constituencies, such as Protestant fundamentalists and disenchanted Democrats. "Reagan's landslide victory [in 1980] seemed to augur the beginning of a conservative realignment comparable in depth and scope to the New Deal realignment of 1932," Judis notes, "but the big shift never took place."

Victory in the Cold War took away "the movement's underlying focus and rationale. Without the priority of national defense, existing squabbles over federal spending, appointments, arts policy, and school prayer suddenly became major conflicts." And older conflicts that the movement had long suppressed began to resurface. "Conservatives began fighting over foreign aid, immigration, Israel, and even Jewish influence in terms little different from 1948," Judis writes.

The "noisiest quarrel" took place between the traditionalist "paleoconservatives" and the ex-liberal "neoconservatives." The former accused the latter "of being crypto-socialists and of mistaking, in [author Russell] Kirk's words, 'Tel Aviv for the capital of the United States.'" The neoconservatives accused the "paleocons"