

Contemporary Affairs

**SON OF THE
REVOLUTION**
by Liang Heng
and Judith Shapiro
Knopf, 1983
301 pp. \$15



Growing up in Mao's China taught Liang, now a U.S. citizen, one terribly important lesson: "the danger that lies in blind obedience." Born in 1954 in the central Chinese city of Changsha, Liang, like most toddlers, was taught that Mao was "like the sun itself." But the ways of this almighty figure were, he quickly learned, frighteningly unpredictable. In 1957, his mother, a party functionary, following the orders of the reformist Hundred Flowers Movement, criticized one of her superiors. The next year, when the party inaugurated the Anti-Rightist Movement, she was punished for following Mao's earlier command. To show his loyalty to the "Great Saving Star," Liang's father, a journalist, divorced his wife, but the family remained stigmatized. Liang's narration of subsequent tribulations (a six-day stint of solitary confinement at age 15 for corresponding with a "rightist"), his growing disillusionment, and his attempts to survive (joining a gang of teenage hoodlums, he felt "truly free" for the first time) reads like a Kafka fable come true. Allowed to enroll in Hunan Teacher's College in 1978, he there met Judith Shapiro, an American teacher, whom he subsequently married and with whom he penned this vivid account of a truly lost generation.

**CONSEQUENCES OF
PARTY REFORM**
by Nelson W. Polsby
Oxford, 1983
267 pp. \$8.95

"If it ain't broke," current wisdom in Washington goes, "don't fix it." This study of the consequences of the 1968-72 reforms of the presidential candidate selection process suggests that skepticism toward political tinkering is warranted. Acknowledging that back-room politics can produce presidential disasters of the Warren G. Harding variety, Polsby, a Berkeley political scientist, charges that the liberal reformers' moves to "open up" the presidential selection process have backfired. Not only have they increased the power of the media and special interest groups in shaping elections; they have driven