

*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

many Americans away from the polls. Replacing the "closed" state party conventions, presidential primaries are indeed sending more women, blacks, and Hispanics to the national conventions, but they are nonrepresentative (wealthy, highly educated) minorities who displace "mainstream" delegates. Early primary winners go on to be rubber-stamped by party convention empty of political substance—i.e., compromise, coalition-building. If they win the Presidency, such candidates may take office as experts in being nominated and elected, but novices in governing the heterogeneous American populace. Polsby's recommendations? Let parties be parties. Some state and local parties conform to the reformers' ideal of openness. Others, "exclusive, narrow, and hierarchical" as they are, he argues, are still more "broadly based and highly diversified" than any other interest groups. U.S. parties will produce worthy, astute candidates if reformers keep their distance.

### Arts & Letters

**PRISONERS OF HOPE:**  
**The Silver Age of the Italian**  
**Jews, 1924-1974**  
 by H. Stuart Hughes  
 Harvard, 1983  
 188 pp. \$15.00

Although the word "ghetto" is Italian in origin (Venetian Jews were first segregated on an island, the site of a foundry, or *geto*, in 1516), Italy can boast a tradition remarkably lacking in religious prejudice. Its ancient Jewish communities are among the most assimilated in the world. Is it then possible, asks historian Hughes (now of the University of California, San Diego), for Jews "both to be highly assimilated *and* to treasure their Jewish heritage"? Hughes considers the literary careers of six notable 20th-century Italian Jewish writers. The first to receive critical recognition, Italo Svevo, author of *The Confessions of Zeno* (1923), a comic novel praised by James Joyce, made very little of his Jewishness; the last, Giorgio Bassani, was unique in treating his origins explicitly and affirmatively in such works as *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini* (1962). For most of the six, a sense of religious heritage came with age, though for some the experience of suffering