

# The HHH/Sgt. Shriver Axis

by Jack Newfield

**S**ARGENT SHRIVER IS THE LEADING contender for the Democratic Party's Vice Presidential nomination because Hubert Humphrey believes that Shriver symbolizes both the idealism of the War on Poverty and the romance and nostalgia of the Kennedys.

But Hubert is mistaken. Shriver, in fact, is the symbol of hoax and failure to the poor, and of opportunism and betrayal to the Kennedys, if not to their constituency. Shriver, as architect, administrator and salesman for the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), is morally and politically responsible for the "other war" which Lyndon Johnson lost during his tenure in office.

On January 31, 1964, President Johnson asked Shriver, already director of the Peace Corps, to develop his "unconditional War on Poverty in America." Shriver was given six weeks to assemble a program and draft what was to become the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. He hired such intellectuals as Professor Daniel Moynihan and Adam Yarmolinsky, and he consulted with radicals like Paul Jacobs and Michael Harrington. But more meaningful was the fact that the poor themselves were not asked to participate in the creation of the poverty program.

Even before the first piece of OEO legislation passed the Senate on July 23, 1964 (by a vote of 61 to 34), Shriver had made two compromises which guaranteed that the poverty war would be waged with blanks: first, he let Phil Landrum of Georgia, coauthor of the notorious Landrum-Griffin Bill, write into the original legislation a clause which gave all present and future governors (Wallace, Maddox, Reagan, Kirk, etc.) an automatic veto over any proposed project in their state; second, Shriver made a private deal with senior Southern congressmen that Yarmolinsky would not be hired as deputy director of OEO. The Southerners considered Yarmolinsky, then an aide to Robert McNamara, to be

an "extreme leftist." (According to a series of columns written at the time by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, anti-Semitism also motivated the Southerners' insistence on a pound of flesh.)

By April of 1966, it was clear that Shriver either couldn't or wouldn't fight the congressional chairmen, the mayors or the bureaucracy on any important issue. He let Mayor Richard Daley convert Chicago's poverty program into a patronage mill. He cut back the Community Action Program whenever local City Halls complained. He cut off funds and then only partially refunded the movement-oriented Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) project when Senators Stennis and Eastland complained. And he refused to criticize the escalation of the Vietnam War, which was already diverting funds and energy from the OEO.

So by the time Shriver addressed the founding convention of the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty (CCAP), he was on the defensive. He began by reciting a litany of OEO's "remarkable achievements" to a room full of people who had experience only with OEO's failures. Organizers from SDS who had watched the politicians take over the Chicago program were there, and so were activists from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, who were bruised by the cutback in funds for CDGM. The poor interrupted Shriver's bland, unrealistic speech with boos; they shouted questions, particularly about CDGM. But the plastic salesman of the Great Society kept on reading his prepared text, ignoring all direct, personal questions.

Finally, Shriver looked down at the shouting faces, most of them black, and declared, "I will not participate in a riot," and walked out. A few hours later he still could not understand the rage that had been liberated by OEO's grandiose promises and empty performances. He still needed a scapegoat and rationalizations, and told a press conference, "The

people involved in the yelling business were determined beforehand upon breaking up the meeting as an end in itself."

**A** FRIEND ONCE ASKED Robert Kennedy what the Kennedys thought about Sargent Shriver working for Lyndon Johnson. "The Kennedys think he is a Shriver," the late senator replied. And although the polls and the press continue to portray Sargent Shriver as a loyal and logical legatee of the Kennedy family's reform politics, the fact is that he is not. Robert Kennedy did not even regard Shriver as a political ally, much less a member of the Tribe. Senators like Claiborne Pell and Joseph Tydings endorsed Robert Kennedy for President, but his own brother-in-law never did.

The best insight into the actual relationship between Kennedy and Shriver is gained from an incident that took place in the White House in July of 1964, which is reported in somewhat laundered form in Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President: 1964*. At that point Robert Kennedy was still in a trance of grief following his brother's assassination, and he could not really focus on the question of whether he should seek the Vice Presidential nomination. But Shriver, through his former Peace Corps colleague, Bill Moyers, was actively campaigning for the second position on the 1964 ticket. One afternoon, Kenneth O'Donnell, a passionate RFK loyalist, was in LBJ's inner office when Moyers called on a direct talk box to tell the President that he had secretly spoken to Shriver, and that Shriver had told him that "the family wouldn't object" if Shriver accepted the Vice Presidency, and "Bobby wouldn't be upset at all." At that point O'Donnell, who Moyers did not know was in with Johnson, reached over the President's desk, slapped down the switch on the voice box, and barked, "The fuck Bobby wouldn't!"

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screaming about the encyclical have forgotten the authoritarian nature of the structure that serves their Church. They also forgot, until Paul reminded them, who was Pope.

Liberals don't like such factual unpleasanties intruding upon their projections of reality, and as a result they have become publicly outraged at the Pope, which makes for good copy—like Newsweek's anonymous Detroit Catholic mother who snorted, "Who is the Pope to come into my bedroom?" But the reaction of Georgetown University's conservative philosopher Germaine Grisez had more bearing on the motivation for the Pope's encyclical: "If one is a Catholic, one is a Papist. And if one is a Papist, then one cannot say, 'Rome has spoken and the cause goes on.' One has to say, 'Rome has spoken, the cause is finished.'"

**I**N MANY WAYS, here is the classical political struggle: the liberals have logic, science, psychology and theology on their side; the Pope has power.

Paul knew exactly what he was doing. He fully understood the arguments of

the liberals but chose to reject them. For all the horror it has caused Planned Parenthood, *Humanae Vitae* is not primarily an encyclical about Catholic ethics. It is, very crudely, an effort by a man who is a conservative but not a reactionary to regain pontifical control of the Church from the top, after Pope John got the bishops all excited about "collegiality," which is the Church's version of participatory democracy.

The essence of the encyclical is an appeal to authority, not to reason: "This is what the Church has always taught." Ironically, what the Church has always taught is that birth control is a question of natural law which can be resolved through the use of reason. England's caustic Archbishop Thomas Roberts pointed out that contradiction: "One does wonder about a rational faculty that seems to have been ordained for the exclusive use of theological thinkers of a certain persuasion."

The key to the reading—and dismissing—of *Humanae Vitae* can be found in the minority report of Paul's 57-member Birth Control Commission, the text of which was happily stolen by the National Catholic Reporter. The majority, of

course, came out for basic changes in the Church's line on contraception. The minority report was signed by four theologians, three of them Jesuits. It almost ignored theological considerations, asserting that the Vatican must remain immobile on the issue of contraception because "if the Church should now admit that the teaching passed on is no longer of value, teaching which has been preached and stated with ever more insistent solemnity until very recent years, it must be feared greatly that its authority in almost all moral and dogmatic matters will be seriously harmed."

A careful textual exegesis will find a similarity of motivation in Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical blasting the Protestants. In their winning argument, the authors of the minority report reminded Pope Paul that Pius XII's *Casti Conubii* was written in direct response to the 1930 Lambeth Conference. "Is it now to be admitted," the four horsemen of the minority report asked in 1968, "that the Church erred in this her work and that the Holy Spirit rather assists the Anglican Church?"

—WARREN HINCKLE

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## BOOKS



### Blacking Out

TELL ME HOW LONG THE TRAIN'S BEEN GONE. By James Baldwin. Dial Press. \$5.95. 484 pp.

**A**FTER THIS NOVEL, it will be pretty hard for anyone to take James Baldwin seriously anymore, at least as a creative artist. There has been ample evidence before this of his obsolescence, but one kept wondering, especially because of the increasing distance between his publications, whether Baldwin didn't have another series of essays stored up, or even a long non-fictional outburst that would capture the ambiguities of race for America today in the same way, for instance, that *Notes of a Native Son* did for yesterday.

Admittedly, fiction has never been Baldwin's forte. One senses that he has written in the genre more out of some conviction that novels are the highest of literary realities than out of real passion. It has been largely a waste of energy. In his essays, certainly among the best in contemporary American literature, he was somehow able to refine his own odd personality in a social crucible and to make it a voice that could speak with a powerful, generalizing authority about blackness. It was an emergent blackness that he was chronicling—a blackness which has now emerged. But in this novel, the voice is not that of a black Jeremiah, but of a middle-aged man whose words have begun to sound canned and homogenized; a man who is not quite sure why events have passed him by but is piqued about it, and who is rather haphazardly trying to assert himself among a new and more robust generation of writers.

A composite portrait of Baldwin emerges from this book, and it is not

especially flattering to his mid-passage. Tastes: at their worst, as they frequently are, hopelessly dilettantish. Sex: homosexual, but not sufficiently reconciled to just say so and let it go at that. Politics: confused, and too involved with personal needs to be even faintly healthy. Probable ambition: to remain king of the black writers, although everyone around him is trying to get the message through that the age of monarchy is gone and has been for several years. Audience: the same people who were pleasurable whipped by his past works, but who have probably gone on to more refined forms of masochism.

The novel itself, so formless and confessional as to approach a further abuse of that already abused term, is about one Leo Proudhammer, a successful black actor at the pinnacle of his achievement, the midpoint of a successful life. A debilitating heart attack is the device Baldwin uses to get his hero into a sufficiently ruminative mood to recollect the hardships and heartbreaks of making it in a white world, and the sort of love affairs and frustrations that go along with being black. Further than that, it is hard to describe.

Throughout *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, Proudhammer remembers all the scenes that have become quite familiar to Baldwin's readers: the sensitive black child growing up scorned and angry, but refusing to wilt under the hot breath of white culture; the potentially close and warm black family, riven by this same culture; the black man miraculously surviving adolescent outrage and going on to chart the limits of his social world. There he sits, Proudhammer/Baldwin, poised between generations, sexes, colors, ideologies, able only to watch the scene and attempt a feeble synthesis. The familiar call to overcome it all by love is there too, but is too common by now to be worth much.

**T**HE INGREDIENTS AMOUNT to pretty much the same country that Baldwin has been splicing together for a long time, but the book is pathetic not because it is saying the same thing in a slightly different way, but because the author doesn't realize it. More important, one senses what seems to be a new desperation and hunger in Baldwin, as he tries to keep his ego in focus at every moment, bending practically everything in sight to his own narcissistic purpose.