Book Review: How To Be Successful In Politics Without Being Really Competent

by William Danks

Jerry W. Johnson, *How To Be Successful in Politics Without Really Being Competent*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1969)

This little book is a masterpiece of contemporary political satire. In addition, given our times, it is also (unfortunately) a rather truthful primer on "practical politics."

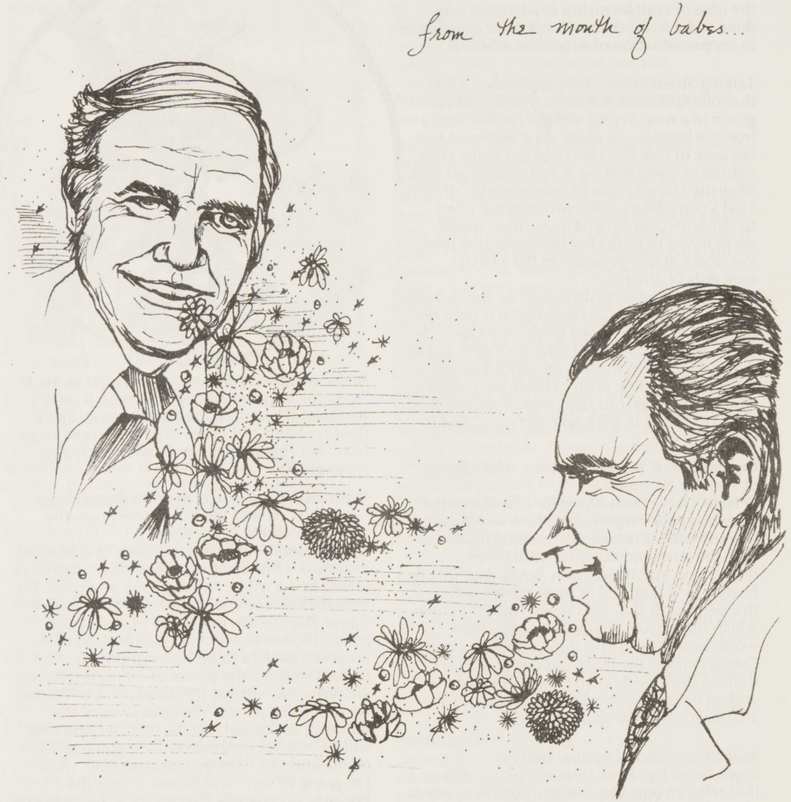
Johnson states in the introduction that the book is intended to help those "of you who have an urge to ball-up something larger and more important than your own personal and business lives."

Like the libertarian Butler Shaffer, Johnson has a great knack for coming up with definitions that are at once funny *and* tellingly accurate. An example is *politics*: "The bringing together of ideas, people, and things in the proper proportion to create conflict, confusion, and chaos out of an otherwise simple situation," or alternately, "the amalgamation of little work, little thought and much proliferation to produce results equally dastardly to all of mankind; such action to be finally perpetrated by those persons who are least likely to know but are most willing to try."

The first chapter gives five criteria by which one can decide if he should try to succeed in politics without really being competent. The reader is asked: (1) does he seek power? ("day and night, at home and in the office, plant or stable"); (2) is he greedy? (3) does he like to travel? ("predicated on the fact that all trips would be *free*!"); (4) does he have an unsatisfied Oedipus Complex? and (5) is he frustrated?

Those that give no affirmative answers are considered to have, at best, an outside chance of getting into politics and are advised that their best chance for success would be in the office of Sheriff. Those that give only one "yes" answer are told that "This score would indicate that you are—even though incompetent—disgustingly normal in other respects. With motivation you could make it into politics, but your chances of ever becoming truly exceptional are dim." They are best suited as Justices of the Peace. Those that score three yeses, however, are definitely in the running ("The human frailties shown by this score, coupled with equal incompetence, could take you very near the top."). Five affirmative answers, of course, qualifies one for U.S. Senator or President.

For succeeding at the polls Johnson's advice is at its practical best. When asked why he is running for office, Johnson



cautions the candidate that, "This is a perfectly legitimate question and one which you should not sidestep. At the same time you must not be honest, or your career will come to a screeching halt. You should, therefore, develop a set of stock answers which can be used on any occasion and at any time." Among such classics are "It's time for a change," "I want to help the 'little man,' " and "Something is rotten in City Hall."

In conducting his campaign the incompetent candidate should emphasize his lack of funds and "convince those who are equally deprived that, as sorry as you are in all respects as a human being, they still owe you a vote. You must have that vote to keep from sinking all the way to the bottom!"

Johnson counsels the candidate to always speak in generalities, and when forced to take a final unequivocal position on an issue, he should always reply, "It is quite probable under some circumstances, although there are likewise some notable, although rare, exceptions to that too!"

The book's last chapter is titled "How to Perpetuate Yourself in Office After Proving Your Complete Incompetence" and offers valuable advice in holding on to power through such messy things as impeachment proceedings, recall, re-election, and attacks on your character. The trick is to use your demonstrated incompetence to your own advantage. You were obviously the victim of the establishment's Old Guard, not to mention the Power Elite.

Loel Ann Brooks has illustrated the book with a half-dozen apt and caustic cartoons. They offset Johnson's dedicated, pedantic (and hilarious) prose style just perfectly.

Although the book wasn't published until 1969, one wonders if one of the previous year's presidential candidates wasn't a student of Johnson's when he writes, "Remember, what you lack in competence or in human character can be overcome with a sincere desire to succeed!" ⊖

Movie Review: Zero for Conduct

Ronald W. Schwarz

At the time of his death in 1934 at the age of 39, Jean Vigo had completed only three short films and one feature. In spite of this small output, his influence on modern cinema has been enormous. This is primarily due to his short film *Zero For Conduct*, which, although completed in 1933, was banned by the official censor in France until 1945.

The film deals with the conspiracy and revolt by a group of French schoolboys against their head-masters. On Alumni Day, the rebels bombard the visiting dignitaries with old shoes and tin cans, driving them from the stage and forcing them to seek refuge indoors.

The political implications of the film, as well as its affront to the dignity of venerated French institutions, were not lost on the censors. Nor, apparently, was Vigo's background. His father, Almereyda, was an active French anarchist in the pre-World War One period, who was found dead in his prison cell one day (when Jean was twelve years old), strangled with his own shoelaces. The police verdict, of course, was suicide.

Lindsay Anderson, the British film director, did a re-make of this film a few years ago entitled *If . . .*, which (as is often the case with re-makes) was far inferior to the original. It should prove valuable to contrast their respective efforts.

Anderson took Vigo's story (minus its subtleties) and added some sex and violence to make it "contemporary." Vigo's schoolboys' revolt follows naturally from their attitude throughout the film: one of joyful ridicule. They bombard the Establishment with trash and then dance away, laughing and singing. On the other hand, Anderson's schoolboys act like stereotyped New Left revolutionaries, taking their opponents (and themselves) far too seriously. We see them, grim-faced, mowing down the assembled dignitaries with machine guns (a rather bizarre reaction to the petty indignities of school life). Vigo's film succeeds because it functions as allegory; Anderson's tries to make it as fantasy, and fails. Ultimately, laughter will prove far more damaging to these oppressive institutions than bullets.

Francois Truffaut, in his first film, *400 Blows*, pays homage to Vigo by means of a lenghty cinematic "quote" from *Zero for Conduct*: a class walk in which the boys break ranks behind the unsuspecting teacher's back and go their various ways.

The beauty of Vigo's film lies not only in its content, but in *how* this content is treated. Vigo uses cinematic devices to convey the light-hearted spirit of the film: a boy's conjuring act (in which the camera is stopped, an object removed from the scene, and the camera started again, thereby causing the object to "disappear"); and animation (a drawing in a notebook suddenly jumps up and runs around the page). In addition, a slow motion pillow fight and parade by the rebellious schoolboys has been described as one of the most beautiful sequences in film.

Especially powerful is the quality of expressionism in the film: that is, the deliberate distortion of an object in the film in order to convey a concept. Vigo has the role of Headmaster in the school, the top figure of authority in the film, played by a *midget*. Also, on Alumni Day, on stage with the visiting dignitaries, half of the seats are filled with wooden dummies!

These two delightful elements in the film effectively convey a rather abstract concept—Vigo's attitude toward authority—without any further elaboration. Moreover, they serve to illustrate an important point: that a vital function of art is to attack, to ridicule, to satirize that which the artist opposes. Picasso's *Guernica*, painted to protest the bombing of civilians during the Spanish Civil War, is another, more serious example.

The fact that a work of art is an expression of an artist's values doesn't necessarily limit the artist to a positive exposition of those values. "If you have the capacity for love, you must hate in an equal measure."—Richard O. Wright.

Restricting art to the glorification of an ideal is indicative of that dogmatic approach typified by those muscle-bound men and women on the murals decorating the walls of the Moscow Subway System.

Events in contemporary American society more often prove disturbing than pleasing, and no wonder, considering who makes the decisions and in whose interests they are made. The contribution of artists, in attacking the madness that they see around them, must be zealously supported. (John Lennon!) ⊖

Letters

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contain all of the libertarian spectrum is excellent.

R.A. Maddock
Pullman, Washington

To the editor:

Your article "Should Libertarians Vote" by Murray Rothbard (April, 1972) deserves comment. Rothbard says, ". . . we are *not* free to vote the state out of existence." Right on, Dr. Rothbard! Except that because governments won't go out of existence tomorrow, Dr. Rothbard continues, "Failing that, it is only sensible and not at all immoral to make use of that electoral choice which, however picayune, the State allows us from time to time. Let us employ every area of choice that we can in the service of liberty."

Dr. Rothbard might just as well have written, "We are *not* free to end wars tomorrow; failing that, it is only sensible and not at all immoral to use the military by making this choice which the State allows us, and join their forces in the service of liberty!"

Just as there would soon be no war if a significant number of people resisted, protested, *refused and urged others to refuse* to participate in military activities, so too there would soon be no government if a significant number of people resisted, protested, *refused and urged others to refuse* to participate in political activities.

Ernestine & Richard Perkins
St. Thomas, Ontario ⊖

News Notes

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The Libertarian Party
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Jailbreak

In Colombo, Ceylon, an enraged mother elephant has succeeded in getting her baby released from police custoty. Police had rescued the young elephant from a jungle well and tied her to a palm tree. That night the mother, backed by 13 other elephants, charged the police post. Baby was released and all the elephants disappeared into the jungle.

Dorothy Day Threatened by I.R.S.

Dorothy Day, world-renowned humanitarian, co-founder of the radical Catholic Workers and recipient of the 1972 Laetare Medal for "comforting the afflicted . . ." has been served with a Federal Government claim for $296,359 in unpaid taxes. She is accused of not requesting IRS permission for tax-exempt status. Said the 74-year-old Miss Day: "The Government has no right to legislate as to who can or who are to perform the