

Political Dreams

MEN can dream, can't they? And, while they are about it, they might as well dream about a political future that would restore to us our individual dignity and freedom to own and act. We need parables to tell us that the libertarian philosophy has regenerative power, and that we aren't necessarily destined to become a world of ants or bees, each of us assigned for life to our little place in a communistic heap or hive.

Two good men have dreamed recently about a forthcoming dramatic shift in American political behavior that will save us from the hive. One of them, Allen Drury, is an old hand at writing political fiction. His latest novel, *Capable of Honor* (Doubleday, \$5.95), is the third installment of what has been projected as a tetralogy. Once again we meet old political and diplomatic heroes and villains who made Mr. Drury's *Advise and Consent* and *A Shade of Difference* such memorable

stories of crises in Washington, D.C., and in the outer world.

The other political dreamer is Holmes Alexander, one of our more lively conservative newspaper columnists. His novel, *The Spirit of '76* (Arlington House, \$6.00), follows the same basic pattern that forms the groundwork of Mr. Drury's *Capable of Honor*, for each story is built around the flummoxing of modern collectivist "liberals" by a strong president of libertarian bent who happens to be in the White House because of the death in office of a predecessor.

Like Mr. Drury, Mr. Alexander has written an installment in a series, for two characters who appeared in Alexander's collection of short stories about Washington political life, *The Equivocal Men*, are with us again in *The Spirit of '76*. One of the characters is Calvin Borton, the "liberal" scandal-mongering columnist; the other is his conservative opponent, Phil Obermeister, a decent fellow who has

a hard time selling his stuff to an opinionated "liberal" press. Together these characters give the reader a running commentary in piquant counterpoint on what happens in Mr. Alexander's spirited dream tale.

The Role of the Press

Of the two novels, Drury's *Capable of Honor* has the more professional finish. Like its two predecessors in the projected tetralogy, it makes canny use of contemporary parallels, taking bits and pieces of living people and recombining them to form new, but instantly recognizable, human beings.

Everything that Mr. Drury writes is courageous, but *Capable of Honor* is the nerviest thing he has yet done, for this novel takes the whole mass communications industry in the United States for its collective villain. The leader who gives the signals to newspaper, magazine, radio, and TV in *Capable of Honor* is a portentous columnist named Walter Dobius, more familiarly known to his old colleagues as "Walter Wonderful." He is not basically an evil man, for he believes in what he is doing. But he does evil with an utterly humorless inadvertence, for he can't conceive that there should be an elementary fairness even on the front pages

in the presentation of news as such. Walter Dobius thinks there is only one side to any given story, and that side is the one that grows from his own "liberal" bias.

So, when "good old Harley Hudson," who has become President of the United States after seven frustrating years in the Vice-Presidency, actually stands up to the communists when they massacre American citizens and burn Standard Oil installations in far-off Gorotoland in Central Africa, Walter Dobius takes it as a personal affront. His advice would have been to let the UN "negotiate" with a bunch of bush communists who had illegally seized the power in Gorotoland with the undercover help of Soviet Russia and Mao Tse-tung's Red China. And, when Moscow and Peking compound their mischief by touching off a seizure of the Panama Canal by "local patriots," thus putting the U.S. into two small wars some eight thousand miles apart, Walter Dobius considers it as a sign from the Deity that Harley Hudson must be punished for his refusal to give in to the communists in the first place.

Harley Hudson is a character that has been synthesized by taking a snippet of Harry Truman, a goodly portion of Lyndon Johnson, and large elements of Barry