

is not a fit cathartic for even politically caused neuroses. But it is a means nonetheless; attempts to ignore this by treating violence as an ethnographic artifact or as the result of economic "relative deprivation" deny dignity to men and to politics.

In a work so aware of the flaws of contemporary thought it is surprising to find the signs of interest-group pluralism and of philosophic liberalism which emerge. Yet Arendt argues that America, like Rome, is a regime where power is traditionally delegated to authorities by universal popular consensus and that therefore America can deal with civil disobedience by institutionalizing it, by having groups of disobedients register as congressional lobbies. One calls to mind Louis Hartz's reflections on the difficulty for Americans of invoking tradition as a value. One also wonders how Arendt can be so sanguine about the effects it has for innovative groups, as recently portrayed in Theodore Lowi's *Politics of Disorder* (to say nothing of the now classic work of Robert Michels). Does her conjunction of Rome and America in the same category not betray the same neglect of primordial ties which is characteristic of modern political thought? Roman political consensus was based on a shared ancestry and civic religion, while American consensus never was. To equate the two is to ignore the significance of such factors for man's political life. It is certainly to misunderstand the classical *polis*. And insofar as Arendt takes her false image of the *polis* as a model for what politics ought to be, her work is defective.

These are not trivial faults. But at a time when political theory shows few signs of life, let alone perfection, Arendt's faults are dwarfed by her virtues. She is a rare theorist, one who can move between Plato and contemporary civil disobedience without becoming entangled in either pedantry or ideology, making each topic shed light on the other. If philosophic immortality demands something more, surely most of our contemporaries offer far less.

SDS by Alan Adelson

(Charles Scribner's Sons; 276 pp.; \$10.00)

Peter Henner

References to SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) usually mean the SDS that emerged from the old League for Industrial Democracy, worked to build a radical, humanistic ideology and organized the 1965 March on Washington against the war. That SDS grew to a membership of a hundred thousand in 1968, and died in 1969. Since then, the Progressive Labor Party, a self-styled Maoist group which played a major role in disrupting the old SDS, has tried without much success to build a new organization around the old name. It is this posthumous SDS that Adelson writes about; his book is not the story of an organization but a description of a political zombie.

The book might have been titled "Young Radicals I Have Known," for it is basically a collection of anecdotes. Moreover, most of Adelson's stories refer to SDS at Columbia, and Columbia is far from a representative campus. The Midwest is ignored and the Boston area (where Progressive Labor is strongest) hardly mentioned, nor are we told anything about the efforts of the surviving SDS to organize campuses such as the community colleges in New York City.

While Adelson glorifies Progressive Labor and SDS, that is not as troubling as is the absence of thoughtful analysis. He omits embarrassing facts, distorts others, and spices his stories with one or two outright lies.

Among the more blatant inaccuracies is Adelson's assertion that in the 1969 SDS convention, which brought about the final schism in the old organization, "RYM [Revolutionary Youth Movement, a faction of SDS] was already on the run. It was apparent that after three years of indefatigable organizing, political

persuasion, and leadership in SDS's biggest battles at Columbia, Harvard and San Francisco State, Progressive Labor had brought a majority faction to an SDS convention." Aside from the questionable claim that RYM was "on the run," the statement errs in several ways. P.L. did have a leadership role at Harvard, though its "political persuasion" only succeeded in alienating most of the members of SDS who were not members of P.L.; it had a questionable role at San Francisco State; it had no leadership role at Columbia whatsoever. More important, it is simply untrue to say that P.L. had a "majority faction" at the convention. About a third of those present were nonaligned, while the remainder divided evenly between RYM and P.L. But that the P.L. faction was "brought" to the convention is a fact. About a hundred members of P.L. chartered a plane from California (many of us at the convention used to say—only partly tongue-in-cheek—that they probably chartered because they were too old for the youth fare).

Whatever his sources may be, and Adelson does not say, he commits too many errors to have been there himself. Adelson seems supremely indifferent to facts, however, and would no doubt dismiss these remarks as carping.

The faction of SDS described by Adelson is the only one which still has a formal existence. Although it is a substantially smaller movement than the Campus Crusade for Christ, it has convinced Adelson, a journalist formerly with the *Wall Street Journal*, that it is capable of organizing workers and students into a revolutionary alliance. Their ability to persuade a member of the Establishment might suggest that P.L.'s SDS should be able to convince also some

students and workers. They have not done so to date. One explanation is tempting: possibly the Establishment has its own reasons for promoting P.L. as the voice of younger

radicals. Another explanation is closer at hand: possibly Mr. Adelson is a bit naive. The evidence of this book favors the latter explanation.

Imagination and Power: A Study of Poetry on Public Themes by Thomas R. Edwards

(Oxford University Press; 232 pp.; \$7.50)

John Tytell

Thomas Edwards, early in his engaging and urbane study of the poet's use of political subjects, remarks that disillusionment with politics is a condition of our times. Since Aristophanes, the skepticism of power has been the property of poets, part of a tradition that uses the falseness of men who serve themselves in the public name as a foil for the private integrities of the artist. An irreconcilable antinomy exists between the poet, whose words are carefully measured artifacts designed to guide the reader to disciplined understanding, and the public man, who irresponsibly sacrifices language for personal power in the name of the common good. On this point writers of all political persuasion unite: In our time George Orwell on the left and Ezra Pound on the right have castigated political leaders for their contributions to the degeneration of language. Most writers subscribe to the eighteenth-century notion that the way we use words governs both thinking and morality—a motivating belief, as it implies governance in the profoundest and most pervasive sense—and the result is a necessary rivalry between the contemplative man of the imagination and the pragmatic man of decision. The antithesis has been fruitful for the concerns of art. Despite a natural distance caused by a suspicion of slogans and inflated rhetoric, and despite a meditative advocacy of in-

ner experience, poets have been fascinated (or appalled) by those who move nations and stage spectacles of suffering.

Imagination and Power tells how poets have confronted questions of public significance since the Renaissance. Mr. Edwards's method depends upon exegesis of representative poems to illustrate both the range of attitude in a given period and a general evolution from, for example, the confidence in monarchic stability of Shakespeare's history plays to the uncertain judgment of modern poets when considering events of magnitude. Edwards argues that poets started to use their contempt for public corruption as the motivation for poems in the eighteenth century. Before the satiric thrust of the age of Dryden and Pope, writers such as Spenser, Milton and Marvell could still conceive of heroic action. Edwards examines Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* as a prototype of Elizabethan feelings about men of power. *Tamburlaine's* ability to say things into being is a sign of the sacredness of power, its mysterious connections to deity. Edwards reveals how power can create its own moral justifications for Marlowe; how greatness may not be measured by ordinary standards (as Carlyle and Nietzsche also believed). With *Tamburlaine* and *Coriolanus* Edwards sets the stage for demonstrating the intolerably high cost of great actions.

This grandly Miltonic sense of the largesse of heroism wanes in the later seventeenth century as heroic man becomes "an object of pious nostalgia." Just as the realistic bias of the emerging novel form spreads the idea that great men may be as pretentiously hollow as their followers, so too the mock-heroic mode reduces epic stature to the audience's sense of what the real world is like. The result is the emasculation of the heroic image, as in Butler's *Hudibras*. Replacing the hero, the poet himself becomes the dominant presence in public poems; instead of wondering about the moral nature of power, poets concern themselves with participation in, or resistance to, power.

The use of poetry to counter the abuses and excesses of political power begins with Dryden, for satire is the most open literary form of resistance. Edwards focuses on Dryden's "The Medal" because the vehemence of his attack on the ambitiously unprincipled Shaftesbury almost dissolves the distinction between art and polemic. The portrait of Lord Shaftesbury is a fulcrum for changing attitudes toward public men, especially when compared to the earlier panegyric of a Marvell in praise of Cromwell. Dryden's aggressive indictment of Shaftesbury and the perils of crowd rule, however, is atypical. Pope, in the "Epilogue to the Satires," withdraws from the overwhelming public corruption of his time, abandoning Dryden's reasonable persuasiveness for a more didactic corrective that confesses practical defeat. This flight from encounter with society (of course, coincident with Pope's death, the picaresque novel was to succeed through the virtues of social scrutiny) is amplified in the sonorities of Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." The moral imperatives of satire are forgotten as Gray sings pastoral dirges to a ruined past. Such avoidance of politics for the compulsions of oblivion, according to Mr. Edwards, testifies to the final death of the heroic note in poetry.

Romantic poetry has been understood as a renewal of the poet's in-