

# Books

## The Politics of a Guaranteed Income by Daniel P. Moynihan

(Random House; 579 pp.; \$15.00)

Robert Lekachman

The reviews of this large-scale *apologia pro sua vita* have ranged from the merely respectful to the ecstatic. The *New Yorker*, which performed a previous service of the same variety for Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, ran a three-part condensation. Why should the editors of the anti-Nixon *New Yorker*, Michael Harrington and other enlightened souls appreciate a long story about a failed, severely flawed project like the Family Assistance Program, written, moreover, by an admiring associate of Richard Nixon? Why indeed in a season of liberal demoralization is there serious danger that this obviously *ex parte* record of the rise and fall of welfare reform will be generally accepted as standard history?

Well, the author, one of the book's two major heroes (the other, of course, is the President himself), does tell a rattling good story, even if the prose is often bloated, the tone almost imperial and the sheer quantity of words excessive. Here is this inveterate Democrat Pat (as all the world knows him) Moynihan, called to high position by that inveterate conservative, harrier of subversives and nonindulger of poor people and other losers—Richard Nixon, the man liberals long have loved to hate. In the liberal community of which Pat has long been a part the suspicion is general that the President went to the White House not to praise but to bury a generation of social reform. No one could recall in his Congressional career a single evidence of social concern or compassion.

Undaunted, our hero joins this great captain of grim visage and sets out on a strange voyage. Early on he discovers that HEW files bulge with income maintenance proposals, especially negative-income tax devices favored by economists. The HEW bureaucrats, lacking confidence in the Nixon new order, prefer to keep their heads down and their mouths shut until Teddy Kennedy or some other liberator appears. Moynihan knows better. With the help of "liberals" like Robert Finch, then HEW Secretary, "moderates" like George Schultz at Labor and John Ehrlichman at the President's right hand, Pat succeeds in overcoming the opposition of real conservatives like Arthur F. Burns, the President's old friend and counselor. All too accurately the conservatives warn Mr. Nixon that members of his own party will interpret FAP simply as an expansion of a detested welfare system and that liberals, in familiar paranoid fashion, will give the President no credit whatsoever.

For his part, the great captain listens with impeccable courtesy to all his advisors, takes their documents with him to Rumania and returns convinced that, regardless of political gains and losses, something had to be done about the welfare mess, and FAP was at a minimum bound to be an improvement on the existing nonsystem of income maintenance. In the original Administration version FAP would have cost the Treasury an additional \$4 billion, distributed mostly among the working poor and, especially, rural

Southerners, black and white. In the more generous Northern states benefit levels above the meager FAP level were to be preserved. But FAP's \$1600 was far more than most of the Southern states were now allocating.

The President tried to soothe conservatives in two ways. He bathed FAP in seas of rhetoric about the work ethic, distinguished it from bad Democratic schemes like negative income taxes and insisted that the point of the operation was to remove people from welfare rolls, the better to place them on payrolls. As a sign that the rhetoric was serious, FAP required female heads of families with children of school age to accept jobs or training on penalty of benefit reduction. Liberals were expected to content themselves with the reality of the first universal income maintenance measure ever proposed by an American president and to accept the \$1600 figure as a modest first step dictated by budgetary limitations and political reality. Liberals were also credited with sufficient sophistication to apprehend that a conservative politician simply had to dress liberal legislation in old-fashioned, conservative clothes.

For Dick and Pat things at first go well. Congressman Mills, a subsidiary hero, studies FAP with a skeptical but open mind, pronounces it good and shoves it through the Ways and Means Committee and then the House of Representatives itself. Indeed he achieves this not inconsiderable feat in two successive Congressional sessions. Alas, there is no Wilbur Mills in the Senate. His opposite number, Finance Chairman Russell Long, neither leads his colleagues nor approves of FAP.

Long is only a minor annoyance. The true villains are former Senator John Williams, on the right, who took his parting public service to be the destruction of FAP, and George Wiley, on the left, founder and leader of the National Welfare Rights Organization. Williams sniped shrewdly at the perversities and inconsistencies of FAP formulae, using

to devastating effect materials reluctantly furnished by HEW. As for Wiley, after some initial wavering, his opposition became increasingly militant and increasingly intimidating to Congressional liberals otherwise favorably inclined to FAP.

The institutional villains are the liberal establishment and the social welfare professionals. In Moynihan's opinion intellectuals and writers were utterly unwilling to credit Richard Nixon with decent intentions. They were chagrined at the thought that their old target had the courage to take a step forward in social policy far bolder than the New Frontier or the Great Society had ever ventured. Moynihan's acid evaluation of the social workers is put like this:

. . . the reception of FAP within circles professionally concerned with social welfare was strikingly convergent. If there was a difference, it was mostly that by 1969 the size and influence of this group in the United States had significantly changed. Its influence derived from an ever larger audience of educated, well-to-do citizens who normally associate themselves with liberal social measures and follow the opinion of professionals, both in a strict and a loose sense of the term. In turn, the number of professionals grew with successful efforts to obtain public funds to purchase their services, a process in which they, as other elements of grants economy, both responded to induced demand. *This created a not always inchoate class interest* (emphasis added).

The sting is in the tail of the quotation!

Thus, mourns our bard, vanished an historical opportunity, a rare chance to rationalize welfare, raise living standards for the working poor and relieve desperate poverty in the South. FAP was done in by the reasoned opposition of conservatives, the class interest of the social welfare professions and the pride and prejudice of the liberal establishment. Sadly, the President turned his attention to other great matters

of state. Pat went into exile at Harvard.

One hates to spoil such a splendid tale, the very stuff of social science legend. But in point of fact, by the autumn of 1972, when FAP sank without visible trace, it was a thoroughly bad statute crying for decent interment. The steady deterioration of FAP as well as the ultimate application of euthanasia was the work of Richard Nixon more than of all this volume's official rascals put together.

From almost any standpoint FAP was a disaster by late 1972. Congress had so increased marginal tax rates on earnings as to all but destroy the work incentives, never especially powerful, of the original draft. Since the states reserved an option to administer FAP, there was serious doubt about how many of the larger benefits would actually reach the poorest blacks of the rural South. Yet help to this particularly oppressed group had always been for liberals one of FAP's strongest virtues. Northern states were no longer required, as earlier they had been, to maintain welfare standards higher than those mandated by FAP. For civil liberties FAP was a major threat. It curtailed a whole series of

hard-won welfare rights, including that of travel without financial penalty and fair hearing before benefits were reduced or terminated. Just to be sure, HEW was quietly laying the groundwork for a computerized dossier system to keep track of FAP recipients. Was George Wiley really to be blamed for attacking a "reform" likely to lower the meager rations of his Northern constituency and diminish the constitutional protections only recently secured?

The Congressional conservatives encountered little opposition from their White House leader as they turned FAP into an increasingly repressive and ungenerous method of controlling rather than helping poor families. The President's own cunning rhetoric, reinforcing his genuinely conservative instincts, practically invited tightening work requirements, imposing them on the mothers of even younger children and enlarging the power of program administrators over the lives of presumed beneficiaries.

The intensity of the President's commitment is revealed by an event and a non-event which occurred too late for discussion by Moynihan. Late in 1972 the President, accord-

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ing to the political journalists, could have had some kind of a law if he had been willing to accept a compromise patiently put together by Senator Ribicoff, one of FAP's few Senate friends. By this time, tired of welfare reform or persuaded that there was no more political mileage in the topic, the President refused to compromise. The non-event is familiar to students of the President's new Budget message: FAP has vanished. This centerpiece of the New American Revolution, as Mr. Nixon once dubbed it, is discarded without a word of regret.

## The Kennedy Promise by Henry Fairlie

(Doubleday; 376 pp.; \$7.95)

Marc Landy

It is the nature of liberal critics to believe that failures of policy are due not to substantive errors but rather to faulty method. In the social sciences, as a consequence, theories of "decision-making" and "communications" have almost completely replaced any discussion of the actual soundness or propriety of actual proposals. So too in our thinking about contemporary politics: If the failures of an earlier era were due to too little governmental activism, then the faults of our own must be due to too much. Henry Fairlie's book typifies the "neo-Calvin Coolidge" school of political analysis which has lately become rather fashionable. His thesis is simple and glandular. The problems of the sixties were due to the hyperactivity of the Kennedys (a hereditary imbalance which he traces back to Caesar). John Kennedy *did* too much, thereby undermining the stability of those institutions—the bureaucracy and the legislature—which are the fundamental guarantors of our liberty. What is worse, he *promised* too much and thus instilled among the people great expectations

In short, liberals were quite right. At best Mr. Nixon meant only moderately well. Exercising benign neglect, he allowed his bill to turn into a dangerous invasion of personal liberty and then delivered the coup de grace. Even in this season of comprehensible anguish and depression among liberals the taste of intellectuals for self-flagellation ought to stop short of swallowing this massive dose of Irish blarney. Mr. Nixon merits the credit of a consistent public record: he is old, new, once and forever a man of the hard, implacable American Right.

whose lack of fulfillment led to the disillusionment and chaos of the late sixties. "The Kennedys would not sit still in the White House. . . . Activity was their method . . . the very energy, the very conviction, the very zeal with which they pursued their purpose fatally contradicted it."

Fairlie's argument points to a more fundamental one. Was it the elevation of expectations or the failure to fulfill them which was the true evil of the Kennedy reign? Fairlie ignores this issue; for him, political expectations are inherently unfulfillable. The Caesar-Kennedy method of public excitation is always a cruel hoax. "The people are encouraged to expect too much from their political institutions and of their political leaders. They cease to inquire what politics may accomplish *for them* and what they must do for themselves. Instead *they expect politics to take the place which religion once held in their lives and their politicians to be saviors*" (italics mine).

It admittedly strains the imagination to think of Dick Nixon, Dick Daley or even Jack Kennedy as sav-

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