

T.R.B.

from
Washington

A Bullet in the Computer

★ What does anarchy look like? It has a laughing face. It is a wavering crowd of teen-agers on your side of the street ready to dart across and join a more daring band breaking the plate glass of an electronics store. Crash, goes the glass. The boys on this side catch the hysteria; they dash across, somebody puts his arm into the jagged hole and pulls out this . . . and this . . . and this . . . and, laughing with wild excitement, they scuttle off with unimaginable riches. A police car drives up; they run like boys who have been diving from a jetty above a "No Trespassing" sign, each daring the other to climb higher, and here comes the watchman and they all duck and run. But one or two are caught.

Yes, that's what anarchy looks like. And how thick splintered plate glass feels to your feet on city sidewalks; why, if it were ice the pond would hold your weight.

Or anarchy is where two sets of people share the same city but not the same community, the same house but not the same room and where, like different animals in a forest, they watch each other warily until provoked by some intolerable slight. Only *this* forest is made of streets and buildings and plate glass crying to be smashed, and where (it now becomes vividly and unexpectedly apparent) a small minority can upset the whole intricate city balance without too much effort, like a bullet shot into a million dollar computer or, for that matter, a few guerrillas in a jungle defying a bomber. Cities, one suddenly realizes, are built on confidence, and the more modern and intricate they are the more con-

fidence is necessary. Here is another unsuspected vulnerability, we discover, in America's wealth and magnificence.

And for a final thought on the anarchy, it is an idiot nation that lets hucksters sell handguns in hardware stores and rifles in mail order houses, knowing full well that psychotics and firearms come together as inevitably as male and female to coitus, and where the most cherished and admired — John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King — are shot through the neck by white snipers in order that sportsmen can have their guns and businessmen their profits. Yes, that's anarchy. As for us, we'd rather be with the larking Negro boys smashing plate glass and grabbing loot than with the officers and members of the National Rifle Association lobbying against a simple firearms licensing law such as they have in every other civilized nation.

With Kennedy

★ We flew in from Indianapolis in the Kennedy party last week and saw the pillars of smoke rising from the Capital as we made an evening landing. In the big university auditorium at Muncie, Indiana, Kennedy finished his speech on civil rights, and a Negro in the balcony boldly rose and asked: "You are putting great faith in White America, Mr. Kennedy. Is that faith justified?" "Yes," answered the senator unhesitatingly, and went out to find King murdered.

Now that President Johnson has bowed out many people seem to be transferring their hatred to Kennedy. It is quite surprising how passionate this distrust often is. Maybe in its emotional state, the country needs someone who does not polarize passion: witty, low-keyed Gene McCarthy doesn't. He moves to his fate in the Indiana primary, May 7. All the experts tell us that he will not do so well there. The experts, it may be added, have been wrong most of the time — in this extraordinary year.

Or there is Hubert Humphrey. He is sunny and likeable and the natural heir of the Democratic Establishment. We take his unavowed candidacy very seriously. He has been mistaken on Vietnam from our point of view, and almost a flunkey to President Johnson; but even so it is hard to hate Hubert.

One irony is that the people who used to dislike him most — the southerners and businessmen — and who regarded him as a brash, gabby radical, now generally prefer him to Bobby. The two have changed roles. There is a kind of universal fondness for "poor" Hubert overshadowed by Mr. Johnson, and his enthusiastic loquacity is a national joke. He is an eloquent man, it is admitted, only nobody has found the button that turns him off.

At Indianapolis with Senator Kennedy we witnessed an odd scene. He was supposed to dedicate a new campaign headquarters in a Negro ward. The outdoor crowd was gathered, ready for high jinks and enthusiasm. Mr. Kennedy brought the crushing news that King had been murdered in Memphis. Without notes and speaking with restrained tension to a predominantly Negro crowd suddenly silent and huddled against the night cold, he made a moving talk. Maybe Willard Wirtz could have made it, and certainly Adlai Stevenson but few others that we know of. "In this difficult day, and in this difficult time for the United States," he said, "it is perhaps well to ask what kind of nation we are and what direction we want to move in."

The hired campaign searchlight behind picked at the low-hanging clouds. He continued quietly that he struggled in his own heart against the same kind of feeling of hatred and injustice that Negroes must feel tonight. "I had a member of my family killed," he said, "but he was killed by a white man."

He quoted from Aeschylus (his favorite poet, he told the wondering crowd) — "Even in our sleep pain, which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

It sounded like a prayer. A strange evening, not soon to be forgotten.

★ *Note:* Congress finally passed a watered-down, open-housing civil rights bill whose rejection at this time would have been a disaster but whose enactment, we think, won't really change things very much in the ghetto. They need two things above all, *jobs* and *income* — the government as employer of last resort, and income maintenance through a family allowance or negative income tax.

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