
Following the Game Plan

INDISPENSABLE ENEMIES: *The Politics of Misrule in America.* By Walter Karp. *Saturday Review*. 308 pp. \$8.95

By RONALD STEEL

THIS IS A REMARKABLE book, dazzling in its relentless attack on the political system we take for granted, and deeply disturbing in the questions it raises. It is a work of insight and imagination. It is also perverse, cranky, fanciful, romantic and outrageous.

Indispensable Enemies will be charged with irresponsibility, or, at the very least, *lèse-majesté*. It is a truly subversive book in that it undermines most of what we have been taught about democratic government in this country. It does so not by windy pontifications about processes and methods, but by demonstrations of how the system works in practice.

With relentless logic and withering scorn, Walter Karp shows how the will of the majority is consistently defied by the oligarchs who control the political machines in America. He draws the link between the party bosses and their minions in the bureaucracy, in the trade unions and big business. Collusion, he asserts, is the hallmark of the system, and corruption the method by which the oligarchs maintain their control.

There is a conspiracy, he maintains, that runs from the lowest level of the precinct captain right through the party hierarchy to the President himself—a conspiracy by the party oligarchy to maintain control. In this ambition any methods are legitimate—even *deliberately losing* elections.

This is a conspiracy that long precedes Watergate and has nothing to do with break-ins and buggings. Rather it is a conspiracy by the two parties *acting together* to defeat independent candidates and block social reform.

Why do they do this? One might well ask, particularly since it is the opposite of what we have been taught. Even if the parties are venal and corrupt, they presumably want to win elections. And the Democrats, at least, are supposed to be pledged to social reform.

Not so, argues Karp. The Democratic Party, just like the Republican, is the enemy of reform, because any true reform movement with popular roots would mean a loss of control by the party oligarchs. Similarly, independent candidates, whatever their party label, threaten oligarchical control. Thus the two parties must insure the defeat of such candi-

dates—even if it means acting in collusion.

"A party organization will dump any election whenever its control over the party would be weakened by the victory of its own party's candidate," Karp charges. One's first reaction may be to reject this as nonsensical. But Karp provides a number of disturbing examples to buttress his case. Among them: Mayor Richard Daley's successful effort in 1956 to discredit the Democratic candidate for governor of Illinois in order to maintain control over the party machine; Connecticut boss John Bailey's maneuver to split the Democratic vote in 1970 and defeat reform candidate Joseph Duffy by running former Senator Thomas Dodd as an "independent"; and the decision of the Democratic bosses in Vermont to campaign for the Republican candidate in order to defeat reform Democrat Philip Hoff.

Other and somewhat better known examples are those of David Cargo in New Mexico and John Lindsay in New York, both reform Republicans. Cargo became governor in 1966 on a tide of Mexican and black votes, repeating his triumph in 1968 in a coalition that threatened boss control of the party. The oligarchy struck back in 1970 with an infusion of patronage and money from President Nixon. The

RONALD STEEL is the author of *Imperialists and Other Heroes* and *Pax Americana*, among other books.

BOOK WORLD/MAY 27, 1973

result was that the Republican gubernatorial and senatorial candidates lost and "a winning, uncontrolled party was now back in the hands of its shattered party organization which had to inject racial and ethnic antagonisms into state politics in order to regain control."

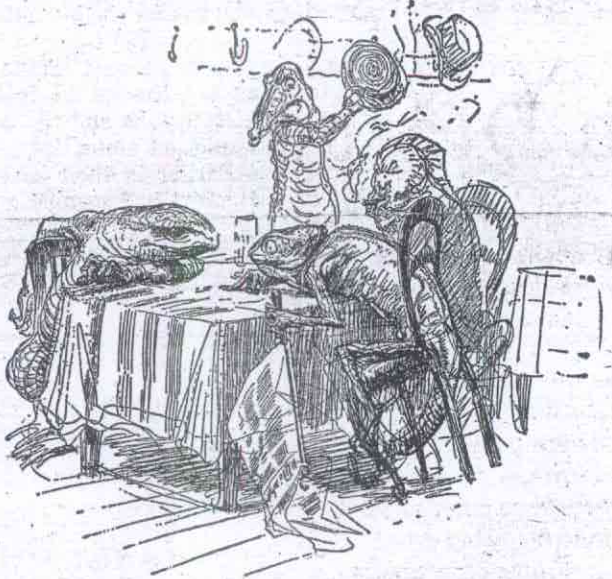
In Lindsay's case, the Republican organization in 1969 backed a party stalwart in the primary, denying the renomination to the incumbent mayor. This was the first contested Republican mayoral primary in 25 years; the last one being the replacement of a La Guardia candidate with a faithful party hack. The moral of the Lindsay story, according to Karp, is that "the Republican state organization will become the determined enemy of New York's Republican mayor" and will engage in collusion with the Democrats in order to block the threat of an independent office-holder.

Collusion, Karp maintains, exists on every level: "it springs up automatically between two state party organizations by virtue of profound bonds of common interest." Those bonds, of course, are control of the party. Where such control is threatened, even a presidential election will be deliberately lost.

The most graphic example is the most recent: the

case of George McGovern, who was dropped by the party bosses, repudiated by the trade union leaders with whom they are in league, and ignored even by the Democrats in Congress. As with Albert Gore in Tennessee, the party bosses were determined to see the official candidate lose because it served their purpose to do so.

Karp, however, does not waste any tears over



McGovern's defeat. On the contrary, he subjects the South Dakotan to a bitter assault for being, of all things, a front man for the party bosses! The reasoning goes like this: The Democratic bosses wanted McGovern to win the nomination because they needed a "fake rebel" to lead an ostensibly reformed party. They "invented a fake, anti-boss candidate to represent the dissident element among Democratic voters" as a way of blocking serious reform. But they had no intention of allowing McGovern to win, since this would bring more newcomer insurgents into politics and threaten boss control. Thus they refrained from contesting his nomination, and failed to back Humphrey, the regular machine candidate, but deliberately threw the election.

Was McGovern then a victim? Not at all, says Karp. He was a "poltroon, a hypocrite, a sheep in plastic wolf's clothing" who faithfully carried out the bosses' orders, who publicly repudiated his own program, and who would stoop to any depths "to prove to the party bosses that even if he, a fake insurgent, were elected President he was willing and able to betray his followers, to scotch insurgency, to jettison his reforms, and to give the party machine every aid and sustenance . . ."

Unfair and disloyal, one might claim. But Karp admits no compromise with "politics." He is unbiased in his contempt for both major parties and the machines that sustain them. It is these party machines, he reiterates continuously, that prevent

us from having true democratic government in America.

There is much in Karp's analysis of American politics that the reader will find dubious or even shocking. Take, for example, his accusation that FDR deliberately proposed the Court-packing plan in order to sabotage the programs of a reform-minded Congress. Or that Kennedy purposely "lost" Congress in 1961 by trumping up the parochial issue to block his own federal aid to education bill. Or, most startling of all, that Lyndon Johnson launched a full-scale war in Vietnam expressly to demolish his own Great Society program, reduce the number of liberal Democrats in Congress, distract the public from domestic problems, and provide the means to suppress dissenters and insurgents.

One of the most fascinating, and in some ways, fanciful chapters is Karp's examination of the cold war. He blasts the orthodox historians for their refusal to see that Truman deliberately exaggerated the Soviet threat in order to pursue a global policy of intervention and counterrevolution. He also, however, attacks those revisionists who explain this aggressive foreign policy in the litany of Marxist economics and argue that imperialism can be blamed on capitalism.

Nonsense, says Karp. "There is not a single modern American war which was forced upon the United States by compelling interest of any kind," whether it be threats from abroad or the supposedly insatiable demands of the capitalist system. "Amer-

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ican foreign policy has been gratuitously aggressive since 1898," he maintains, "for no compelling reason except the oligarchs' wish to prosecute an aggressive foreign policy." Why should they do so? Because this allows them to silence independent voices, stifle reform, dispense grotesque windfall privileges, shroud government in a mantle of secrecy, and mask party collusion under the virtuous mantle of bipartisanship. The party oligarchs do not choose war lightly, but "because war seemed to them the only way to protect their power in a moment of particular peril."

Outrageous? Certainly. Unprovable? No doubt. But there is a great deal here to ponder. Even when Karp does not inspire agreement, his aggressive iconoclasm raises disturbing questions and challenges conventional answers. He is relentless and imaginative on the attack—even when at his most perverse. However, he tends to be weak and even romantic when he prescribes a remedy in the form of local self-government and a "republican" education for free citizenship. This is not a very convincing cure for the disease he analyzes with such devastating precision.

Indispensable Enemies is a book which one may throw against the wall in indignation. But it is unlikely to leave the reader feeling quite the same about party politics in America.