

YOUR MOST serviceable year-round political insult for all uses seems to be the accusation of McCarthyism. If that charge is leveled against anyone, you may be sure the leveler means it to do him in. And the charge can arise, now, in the oddest contexts. Already friends of this administration are calling the attempts to assess responsibility for Vietnam a new kind of "left-wing McCarthyism."

A more predictable use of the term shows up in Fred Cook's new book on Joe McCarthy, *The Nightmare Decade*. The last chapter quotes Shakespeare on the evil that men do, how it lives after them. Cook finds McCarthyism alive and well, and living in Spiro Agnew. Now, as I say, this charge is usually meant to insult the man being called a McCarthyite. But Cook's last chapter is an unfair insult to McCarthy.

What Richard Rovere called McCarthy's "rogue charm" came in large measure from the fact that he was a maverick, a loner, an outsider. Rovere admits he would never have become a Hitlerite ruler — he could not work with a team, join or form an organization, be part of an establishment. He had no movement; the "ism" collapsed with the man.

IN SOME MEASURE McCarthy's success was due to this anti-establishmentarianism. The government was, then, as now, engaged in deception, and a certain suspicion of officials is always justified. Wild and weird as McCarthy got, there was always this not-so-wild element in his appeal.

Agnew's activities, despite similar rhetoric and appeals to mean-spiritedness or mere resentment are entirely different in their thrust, and far more dangerous. He is the corporation man, speaking for the government, tearing into anyone who dares attack or question it. He would add to the government's already swollen powers an immunity to challenge, an unofficial power to censor and coerce, the use of high office for purposes of ridicule and provocation.

He would divide the nation — young against old,

populace against intelligent, "patriots" against peace-advocates — not in spasm of egotistic denunciation, but as part of a concerted political effort to hold power by base appeal, threats and the rousing of fear. When power is seized and maintained and wielded by these methods, the administration is blunting the suspicion of men in power that a free people should have.

FOR AGNEW is not alone, nor his own man — he is not even the sole "hired gun" of this government. He works in unison with the President himself (out on the stump attacking students in the 1970 campaign), with Mitchell and Hoover and Dole, with men using governmental power out to their utmost constitutional limits, and a little beyond — men who then justify this abuse with wild public rhetoric and personal charges. To the extent that these methods are systematized, shared, legitimated and proved effective, the safeguards against misuse of power have been struck down. For if fascism ever comes to America, it will come from men aggrandizing the forces of government, not from men criticizing their misuse.

Joe McCarthy was no angel — but this has to be said for him: he was no Agnew, either. He never sank that low.

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Potomac Fever

Two escaped cons disappeared in Greenwich Village. The natives saw their prison uniforms and thought they were New Jersey politicians.

Experts say the new Russian MIRV isn't accurate enough to hit our Minuteman sites. That means you live in a near-miss area.

New York says you have to live there a year to be eligible for welfare. The office cynic says if you live there a year you ought to be eligible for psychiatric care.



Garry Wills

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Is Vice President A New McCarthy?