



GENERAL SMEDLEY DARLINGTON BUTLER

## Go-Getters

THE PLOT TO SEIZE THE WHITE HOUSE

by JULES ARCHER

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Now, in the midst of Watergate, 40 years after the incident occurred, it has a certain sinister plausibility not widely evident in 1933. At the time, the newspapers reported some allegations that a big business cabal had hatched a "plot"—the headlines generally put it in quotes. Its aim was to undo F.D.R.'s power and install a "Secretary of General Affairs" to take effective control of the Executive as a dictator.

Obviously the plot failed. Jules Archer, journalist-historian, supplies some fascinating details that make the episode considerably more than a paranoid fantasy. In 1933 emissaries purporting to represent an organization called the American Liberty League ap-

91

## BOOKS

proached a retired Marine general named Smedley Darlington Butler. The League was devoted to laissez-faire capitalism and backed by such people as the Du Ponts and J.P. Morgan. The general was offered an extravagant budget—\$3,000,000 for starters, with a possible \$300 million if necessary—to mobilize an army of 500,000 veterans and lead them to Washington, there to force Roosevelt into accepting "the popular will." The cabal even had a man touring Europe to study the Fascists' success with certain veterans' groups.

Butler seemed a likely candidate—twice a winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, an authentic soldiers' hero. But he reported the plot in detail to the House Un-American Activities Committee, then chaired by Massachusetts' John McCormack, later Speaker of the House. At the hearings, the go-betweens denied everything, and the committee was simply afraid to call titans of finance as witnesses.

Another problem was that the whole thing seemed too preposterous a plan to be taken seriously. And it was never decided whether the important figures of finance knew what was being proposed on their behalf. The American Liberty League was finally disbanded in 1936. But Author Archer believes the plot was in earnest—and so did John McCormack, who once told Archer: "They were going to make it all sound constitutional, of course, with a high-sounding name for the dictator and a plan to make it all sound like a good American program." ■ Lance Morrow