



Minor Lewis novel is disturbing now

A NORTH SIDE reader, Charles Kehl, asks, "How do you like this scenario?"

"Nixon is connected with Watergate. The House votes impeachment. A subpoena is issued for Nixon to appear before the Senate.

"The Army surrounds the White House to prevent service of the warrant. The Army surrounds the Capitol, disperses Congress, and Nixon rules by fiat!

"DON'T SAY 'IT can't happen here.' It can and could. John Connally has joined the administration. GENERAL Haig, in full uniform, is Nixon's chief assistant. A former CIA man is secretary of defense."

This idea is so unthinkable, of course, that I have yet to see it suggested in any newspaper or magazine. But Lou Harris and Gallup tell us the public is well ahead of the media in thinking the unthinkable. Obviously the idea is crossing some minds.

"It Can't Happen Here" is fiction, written in 1935 by Sinclair Lewis. Sen. Buz Windrip is elected President, and takes over the government by force, creating a dictatorship.

HIS ANTAGONIST is Doremus Jessup, a newspaper editor. The book became an immediate best-seller, though in style it was one of the weakest of Lewis' novels. The subject fascinated the nation, deep in the Depression, eyeing Hitler and Mussolini across the Atlantic.

President Windrip was not really an evil man . . . just ambitious and unreflective. His attorney general led the attack on the press.

President Windrip's tastes were modest. His reading ran toward Bruce Barton, Edgar A. Guest, Elizabeth Dilling, William Dudley Pelley. "These fellows . . . have Messages," he said. "And we haven't got time for anything in literature except a straight, hard-hitting, heart-throbbing Message."

PRESIDENT WINDRIP wrote a book, "Zero Hour," about his own crises. He dreamed of retirement cottages in Florida and California.

He nominated little known lawyers for the Supreme Court. defense budgets went up during peace.

THE UNITED STATES wouldn't tolerate tyranny? Editor Jessup, before being hauled off to a concentration camp, cited the nation's tolerance of the rule of Huey Long in Louisiana, Father Coughlin's hold on bigots, the tolerance of Tammany graft and Chicago gangsterism, the Ku Klux Klan, Teapot Dome, and war hysteria.

A New York Times editor, Herbert Mitgang, notes the abundance of prophecies and coincidences in Lewis' novel, and says, "American fiction has a way of serving as an early-warning system against what Henry James . . . called 'the triumph of the superficial, the apotheosis of the raw.'"

What do you know about Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr? His appointment as White House chief of staff, succeeding Haldeman, was generally praised. His name had a familiar ring [Gen. Douglas Haig commanded British troops in France in World War I].

"AL" HAIG IS PERSONABLE and reasonable, and for anyone trying to deal with the President, a vast improvement over his predecessor.

But what is the background of a 48-year-old Army officer who was a colonel in 1969 when he came to the White House, was promoted successively to brigadier general, major general, and then jumped over 240 senior generals to four-star-rank?

In the Tribune reference room the only mention of Haig before he went to the White House is in a dispatch from Landing Zone George, Viet Nam, April 2, 1967. Lt. Col. Haig was commander of the 26th Infantry's 1st battalion.

HAIG IS A PHILADELPHIA native who went to Notre Dame and then West Point. He served on MacArthur's staff in Japan.

Haig was a regimental commander at West Point in 1967-68. One of his cadets was Lucian K. Truscott IV, son of a West Pointer, grandson of a four star general. Truscott left the Army some months after his graduation from West Point, and became a writer. Col. Haig called him worse than a hippie, meaning radical, so you may care to discount what citizen Truscott says.

Cadet Truscott locked horns with Col. Haig on several matters, including compulsory chapel. Truscott has written a chilling, detailed account of his encounters with his commander in the May 17 Village Voice.

HE SUMS UP: "Haig is the ultimate action/reaction, stimulus/response addict, a believer in total logic, a distruster of what he must see to be the frailties of lesser men: ideology, morality, a sense of the inevitability of one's death, the acceptance of sin and redemption, in short all those qualities which gave man a context in which to live, a reason for being."

Haig also lies, claims Truscott.

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