

The Rockefeller Way

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Nov. 20—Prime Minister Nehru of India visited the United States in 1961. When he was in New York on Nov. 9, Governor Rockefeller called on him for a private talk. Afterward J. K. Galbraith, the U.S. Ambassador to India, asked Nehru how the meeting had gone.

"A most extraordinary man," Nehru said. "He talked to me about nothing but bomb shelters. Why does he think I am interested in bomb shelters? He gave me a pamphlet on how to build my own shelter."

It is a funny story—and not only in the sense of amusing. There was something peculiar in Nelson Rockefeller's obsession with bomb shelters, which went on for years.

The point is not just the oddness of the shelter fixation. Internationalist liberals who support Mr. Rockefeller's confirmation as Vice President speak of his enlightened and moderate views on foreign policy. To the contrary, there are signs of rigid, extreme, even cranky elements in his outlook on defense and foreign affairs.

Mr. Rockefeller was a strong advocate of nuclear tests; he gave the most grudging support to the 1963 test-ban treaty, saying that the Senate in ratifying it should make clear our willingness to use nuclear weapons against aggression by the "world Communist movement." He criticized the Eisenhower-Nixon Administration as soft on defense spending and over the years has been an unflinching supporter of higher Pentagon budgets. His attitude toward the Communist countries has been that of a frozen cold warrior, reminiscent of John Foster Dulles.

If to this day he has any doubts about the rightness of the American war in Indochina, he has kept them quiet. As late as 1968-69, when Americans who had differed on the war were almost all talking about how to get out, Mr. Rockefeller was still talking about how to win militarily. A person who heard him one evening, making an intense, detailed argument for tougher use of air power in Vietnam, found his fascination with a military solution then peculiar and scary.

There are good and sensible people who admire Nelson Rockefeller, and clearly he has winning qualities. One of them is sheer activism. He bubbles with energy, and that is appealing at a time when we yearn for someone to do something about world problems. But after Vietnam we ought to know that activism in international affairs can be dangerous. The impression Mr. Rockefeller gives is of a figure who has learned nothing from the Vietnam experience—who still thinks the United States can and should dominate

international decision-making, who inclines to intervention as a principle, who thinks in terms of military power. All that at a time when the sources and mechanisms of power in the world are changing from those old forms.

The apparent Rockefeller instincts in foreign policy are the more worrying because of the way he has preferred to operate in office: secretly, through the manipulation of power among a few, avoiding as much as possible the restraints of legislative accountability. Consider, for example, his relationship with William J. Ronan.

As the Governor's personal assistant, Dr. Ronan held no formal state office but was regarded as the second most powerful man in Albany. Then

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he was named to head, successively, two public authorities—bodies that, against democratic theory, operate largely without open political control.

Through those years Governor Rockefeller advanced \$510,000 in "loans" to Dr. Ronan. Accept for purposes of argument that the motive was only friendship. But no matter how honorable the participants in such an arrangement, loans on that scale—made to key figures by a politician uniquely able to spread largesse—must create ties that bind.

The secrecy so carefully maintained on this use of Rockefeller money was significant. So was the care with which "loans" and "gifts" were timed in an effort (probably fruitless legally) to avoid a New York law against giving any "benefit" to public servants. All that bespeaks a consciousness that something more was involved here than friendly gestures.

In his much-praised book "The Presidential Character," Prof. James David Barber told us that we must learn to worry about the character of those we choose to be President. Two vital elements to watch are love of power and the habit of secrecy. Together, after all, those two helped to produce Vietnam and Watergate.

The Senate Rules Committee, mired in detail, seemed unable to take a broad look at Nelson Rockefeller's views or his methods. Hopefully the House Judiciary Committee, strengthened by its impeachment experience, now will. For Congress has every right to make a broad judgment of this man who may be President. Nelson Rockefeller tried and failed to become President through the regular political process, in part because the public felt something in him that it did not trust. Now Congress has the obligation to act for the public in appraising the man and his methods.