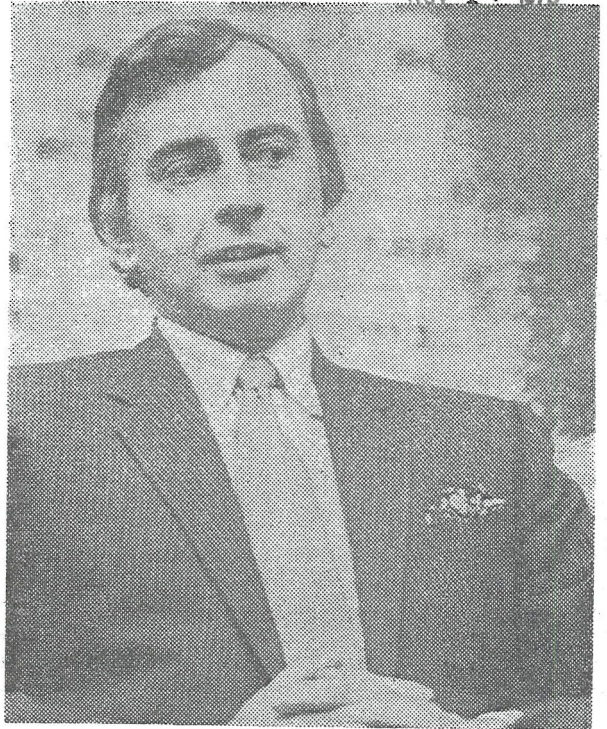


Gore Vidal

-- Back From Yakima

By Michael Grieg



NOVELIST GORE VIDAL
'I'm exhilarated by Watergate'

Novelist Gore Vidal, who has the appearance of an aging altar boy and a reputation for devilish wit, was in form here yesterday. Infernally fine form.

"I've been on a lecture tour to places I didn't know existed — Yakima, Washington, for one," said the author of "The Best Man," "Myra Breckinridge" and the current best seller, "Burr."

He gives a talk, he said that solves "all the world's problems in 28 minutes." At that, he's one step ahead of another popular lecturer, economist John Kenneth Galbraith. "He's garrulous. He takes 40 minutes."

During a press conference at the Mark Hopkins Hotel, Vidal scattered acid remarks with all the abandon of a gung-ho warrior with a blowgun full of poison darts and a lot of scores to settle.

"I'm exhilarated by Watergate and everything that's happening," said the creator of a wicked Broadway entertainment last year, "An Evening with Richard Nixon."

"For the first time in my life, I see a chance for change. Of course, it could be change for the worse. But something's bound to happen.

"I think the people are going to be in such an ugly mood by March, what with shortages and layoffs, a predicted 7 per cent unemployment by spring, that there'll be a great opportunity to put together a more rational government."

With the Democrats in control?

"Oh, I don't like the politics of either party. The same people who pay for the Democrats pay for the Republicans — the gas lobby, the oil lobby, the power people. I'm for a wholly different system . . .

"The Democrats are a bit brighter, they look prettier,

they're funnier. They make some adjustments. The Republicans are dumber and have almost no solutions for real problems."

The only current politician who interests him, said the one-time Democratic candidate for Congress from New York, is George Wallace.

"If he weren't a racist, I might support him. Instinctively, I think by accident, probably through sheer cunning and demagoguery, he sensed that 95.6 per cent of the people, not the 4.4 per cent who own the country, are very fed up with this place and don't like anything about it."

Vidal is hoping that a "best man" can be found to 'arouse the people to vote their interest, to cut down on empire, to cut down on the 37 per cent of the national budget the military takes' and do something about social priorities.

And how about consumer crusader Ralph Nader, a man whose candidacy Vidal supported in the last election?

"Nader is better than anybody else we've got. But he's really not radical enough for me. He doesn't get to the root of things. He just wants to have more safety belts and so on. It doesn't occur to him that we'd probably be better off if General

Motors were nationalized."

Vidal, who is 48 himself and wants to be remembered in 50 years "as a 98-year-old man," feels that many problems aren't really problems. The so-called fuel crisis, for one.

"It's largely a rip-off. The Nixon regime would like nothing better than to strip-mine the whole center of the country under the guise of an energy crisis."

As for the problem of law and order, Vidal would remove from the statute books all laws regulating gambling, prostitution and drugs.

"It's a modest proposal, one that doesn't cost a thing, that would allow the police — the most corrupt in the world — to devote another 80 per cent of their time to

fighting real crime."

Did he plan to sell his book about Aaron Burr, vice president under Thomas Jefferson and the man who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, to Hollywood?

"I don't trust the movies. And I don't need the money. I made that mistake with 'Myra Breckinridge.' Fortunately, I never had to see the damn thing. It was so terrible, I hear. I'm going to try and be strong this time and not sell. Famous last words."

Now that he has written about one ex-vice president, how about another? Say, a novel about Spiro Agnew?

"He doesn't interest me. He was just what he seemed all the time — an ignorant Maryland politician, no better than anyone should expect, as it proved."