

John Chamberlain

Political Underworld



THE MYSTIFYING thing about present day politics is that politics, per se, no longer counts for very much in this matter of preparing for elections. The probability is that the battle for 1968 is going to be determined in a strange twilight realm that nobody has yet dared to talk about.

What the "New Left" is engaged in is a campaign to ruin the "Establishment," along with its elected leader, Lyndon Johnson, by innuendo of a sophisticated and often slyly foul nature. The New Left is bringing mental guerrilla tactics into political war.

HOW DO YOU put your finger on it? There is no easily identifiable leader in the movement. Yet the attack takes many forms that interact to create a very palpable and identifiable atmosphere.

There is the button craze, to take it on its most innocent level. You've seen the buttons on student members of the New Left — "Let's Legalize Pot," "Psychedelicate Suburbia," "Chaste Makes Waste." These make an atmosphere, vaguely anarchistic, which creates the setting for more direct political jabs.

Some of the cleaner political examples read "God Is Alive in the White House," or "LSD, Not LBJ," or "Kill for Peace," or "Draft Beer not Students," or "Make Love Not War." All aimed, of course, at Lyndon Johnson and his conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

Less innocent than the button craze is the widespread whispering campaign that centers on the Warren Report.

WHAT IF Dallas were a Texas plot? And who were the Texans? Oh, no, you can't, you mustn't, say it. But the sub rosa jokesters do say it. They pass it off as a "European" theory of the assassination. But the word gets around in Ivy League America.

And then, all of a sudden, it surfaces in a parody of Shakespeare's "Macbeth." An inordinately clever writer, Barbara Garson, has written a fantasy called "MacBird." There are witches in it—one is dressed as a Beatnik, a second is a Negro in the garb of a Black Muslim, a third is an "Old Leftist" in a worker's cap. They are the ineffable chorus that greets MacBird in a hotel room at the Democratic convention, hailing "MacBird, Vice President thou art. All hail, MacBird, that shall be President."

Whereupon MacBird, like Macbeth of Scotland, gulps and "seems to fear." He is absorbed in his thoughts as the "witches" go on to say: "MacBird shall be the mightiest of all but Ken O'Dunc (get it — Kennedy O'Duncan) alone shall leave an heir" (Bob Ken O'Dunc, of course).

There are enough Shakespearean students left in America to know how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth grabbed off the Scottish crown. So the "thrust," to use a favorite Washington word, of "MacBird" is obvious. It could be, it could be — but you must only hint it.

"MACBIRD" IS all over the place in printed form, and an Off Broadway production is mentioned. It is worse in its effect than anything ever attributed to Sen. Joe McCarthy. But this time the New Left is welcoming its Elizabethan McCarthy, Barbara Garson.

So the web of innuendo is being woven around LBJ. What can ordinary politicians do to combat it? You don't fight the new spiritual guerrillas by the old direct means. LBJ needs someone who is hep to a lot of curious things in order to beat the cats, and he has only 12 months or so in which to find an adviser who makes sense in this new world of the sophisticated smear.