

The Cult of the Personality

Politics under Johnson

THE United States is slowly yet perceptibly moving into the "Johnson Era". President Lyndon B Johnson already dominates Washington in a way that President Kennedy never did, even though Kennedy was clearly a more charismatic leader. He is a masterful politician with more than two decades of experience in the complexities of the American federal government. The presence of the President is felt in the Congress and in all of the various federal agencies to an unprecedented degree. Hardly a wheel turns without the knowledge and approval of the President. Under the American system of government, the presidency is a strong office, but the present occupant of the White House has taken steps to enhance this already powerful office. Many observers have applauded Johnson's impressive domestic achievements during this short period in office, but there has been muted criticism of his "style" and some fear expressed for the future of democracy under so strong an executive.

Important Changes since Kennedy

A number of important changes have taken place in Washington since the beginning of the Johnson Administration which will give some idea of the "new regime" on the banks of the Potomac River. The spirit of dialogue and open discussion which existed during the Kennedy years has disappeared, as have most of the well known intellectuals and academics. Kennedy attempted to convince the public before launching a legislative programme, too often neglecting the intricacies of Congressional politics. Johnson does just the opposite, assuring the success of his programmes by careful manipulation and persuasion of Congressmen and Senators, but permitting very little public discussion or debate even on important legislative matters. The refusal of the Administration to participate in an open discussion on the Vietnam war is one indication of this fact.

The Harvard intellectuals of the Kennedy Administration have, for the most part, been replaced by Texans with limited experience outside the world of pragmatic American politics. Furthermore, the spirit of discussion

of the Kennedy era has been replaced by a kind of subtle authoritarianism. The White House staff are no longer "idea men" but are more like presidential secretaries. Advisors in the State Department and other government agencies are much less free to openly discuss policy with the President. The focus of the Capital is on President Johnson, and every effort is made to keep the spotlight there.

Aim-Twisting: Many Ways

The Johnson Administration is particularly averse to criticism. The "great consensus" is one of the key elements in the Johnsonian "Great Society". Newspaper reporters who write articles critical of the President are put on the mat and lectured. More importantly, they find themselves unable to obtain news stories and are systematically excluded from White House functions. Government officials who publically disagree with the President are simply fired, and Congressmen who vote against Administration measures find that their home districts are without federal government funds for roads, schools, or the poverty programme. Outspoken critics of the Administration's foreign policies like Senators Fulbright and Robert Kennedy are out of favour at the White House, and their home states are losing government contracts. Federal patronage is denied to recalcitrant legislators. The federal "pork barrel" (the annual allotment of federal money to the states and localities) is effectively manipulated by the Administration to coerce co-operation from legislators.

Lyndon Johnson's mastery of the art of pragmatic American politics has paid dividends during the recently concluded session of Congress. An unprecedented number of measures have been passed by the Congress, The Voting Rights Bill helps to assure that Negroes in the South will not be denied the vote, while the Medicare programme firmly places the United States on the road to publically administered medical service. The Education measures provide, for the first time, substantial aid to higher education from federal sources. The war on poverty has been expanded and is beginning to take root in the depress-

ed areas of the United States. Thus, the recent Congress can claim to have the most progressive legislative record in recent decades. Critics of the Congress have stated that it has been a "rubber stamp" of the President, and there is a good deal of truth to this statement Johnson has been charged with using his famous "arm twisting" techniques on legislators, effectively wielding the tremendous powers of his office. It is significant that many of the recent legislative measures, while important steps forward in the struggle for social justice in America, will also tend to increase the power of the President. In the War on Poverty, for example, the President has tremendous influence over which communities receive funds and how the several hundred million dollars are allocated. Naturally, political factors may become involved in the distribution of funds, thereby applying further pressure on legislatures and local leaders to follow the resident's wishes. Federal money can be traded for conformity to the pattern of the "great consensus".

Foreign Policy Not Debatable!

The Achilles heel of the "Great Society" is foreign policy. The Vietnam war is essentially President Johnson's war (with assistance from Secretary of Defence, McNamara). There has been virtually no discussion of American Vietnamese policy in Congress, which under the Constitution has responsibility for declaring war, and many Congressmen are critical of the war. The powerful Senate majority leader, Senator Mansfield is reported to have privately opposed the present escalation, although he has not spoken out publically on the issue. Criticism of American Vietnam policy has been widespread outside of Congress as well. In addition to the Teach-in Movement and the recent protest demonstrations, which had the effect of bringing the opposition into the public eye, there has been discontent from the venerable *New York Times* and many moderate political and business leaders. Indeed, it is fair to say that the Vietnam war is the most unpopular war in which the United States has engaged since the War of 1812.

The intervention in the Dominican Republic has been even more openly criticized in the United States, while the Latin American reaction has been understandably hostile. Senator Pulbright, the influential chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the most astute analyst in the American Establishment, has openly attacked the intervention. His sentiments are shared by most liberals within and outside of the government. The Administration has yet to defend itself on the issue, and it has constantly refused to allow foreign relations to be openly debated.

It would seem that President Johnson simply has very little understanding of foreign affairs, and that he prefers to concern himself with domes-

tic policy, where he is able to wield almost overwhelming power. His over-simplified views of foreign affairs and the impossibility of internal discussion and criticism gives many Americans cause for alarm about future trends in foreign relations. When issues such as Vietnam are discussed, the Administration's "facts" simply do not agree with those of independent observers, and meaningful debate is precluded. And of late, the Administration has refused to publically discuss the issues at all.

Living with the Texan

What, then, of the future? President Johnson is firmly in the saddle and most of Texas seems to be moving to Washington. It is likely that the President will be able to continue his

strong influence over the Congress, and increase his ability to manipulate the legislative branch and the administrative agencies to do his bidding. The President is clearly popular with the people, although he is not the sort of leader who arouses the kind of devotion which John F Kennedy did. The prospects for a shift in foreign relations seems quite remote, with the Administration becoming "harder" in its views rather than more moderate. The American "cult of the personality" seems to be here to stay at least for the next three years, and probably for the next seven. The American people, and the rest of the world, will have to live within the Texan in the White House.

—Philip G Altbach

Are the British Racists?

Taya Zinkin

THE first time I became aware that there is such a thing as colour was when I stayed in a seaside resort hotel in France. There was a commotion in the hotel. For days all the grown-ups talked about nothing else but the extraordinary way in which the British behave. The commotion was sufficiently great for me to remember it though I was barely 6 years old. A British Colonel and his family who had booked rooms for the season protested on arrival because there was a coloured family, probably from French Africa, staying in the hotel. The Manager told the Colonel that if he did not like it he could go elsewhere, that the hotel had no intention of getting rid of the coloured family. The Manager had been so shocked by the Briton that he told everybody about it. Colour bars in France were, and I am glad to say, still are, unheard of.

The British by contrast are racists. A trip to Brazil is illuminating about race relations in the United States. Had the French or the Portuguese or the Spanish colonised the USA, instead of it being the British, there would be no Watts, no segregation, no race riots. North America would be like Brazil, without colour consciousness. Indeed, I remember an American friend saying at the height of the Alabama riots, "We white Americans are what the British made us, and we then proceeded to make the negroes what they are because of

what the British made us. Look at Canada, even their Indians are treated differently from ours, that is because of the French tradition".

Working Class: Worst Racists

The British are racists; and the worst racists of them all are the British members of the working class. This was again reiterated by Desmond Donnelly, the Labour M P, when he warned a club in Exeter University of the "fundamental deep-rooted prejudice of the conservative working man" Donnelly said that very often it is the communist factory shop steward who does not allow the employment of coloured people. He went on to complain that the Government White Paper on Immigration was an insult to Commonwealth immigrants because of the ceiling of 8,500 allowed in every year when there is no ceiling on other immigrants — he must have had Ireland and the continent in mind. The Immigration Act has caused much heart-burn amongst some liberal minded Labour and Liberal MPs because it is a really racist Act which gives wide powers of deportation without redress to a special tribunal, and because it discriminates between blacks and whites, and because it lowers the age of dependents. The Tories were far more liberal than Labour since they are not so dependent for support upon foremen and shop-stewards of the kind Donnelly had in mind.

Racism takes many forms: some of them however are due, not to the evil in man, but to his environment. Thus the mothers of a school in Birmingham have petitioned the local authorities to move their children out of the school to turn it into a reception centre for immigrants. Their reason was not colour prejudice but common sense. There are over 80 per cent coloured children in that school. The mothers did not object to so many children being coloured but to their scant knowledge of English. Their own children were being kept behind; a matter of the greatest importance when at the ripe old age of 11 a child's career is set according to how that child does at the Eleven Plus. The Headmistress of that school had been pressing for a long time for extra teaching staff in order to get over the initial difficulty the immigrant children have in following the classes.

Speaking of racism on the BBC, Robert Gardiner who is the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and the first coloured man to deliver the Reith Lectures, said some very interesting things. He pointed out that it is natural for people to feel more at ease with their people and to believe that their own people are superior. When colour comes in the way of underlining the difference it becomes easier still to be racist, especially when peo-