INTRODUCTION

In the decade that has elapsed since Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin dominated American politics, the atmosphere of the McCarthy years has tended to fade from the public consciousness. But to forget the impact of McCarthyism is a mistake for two reasons. In the first place, the facts of McCarthy's power over public policy and private life in America bear repeating. Richard Rovere has written,

> He held two presidents captive — or as nearly captive as any Presidents of the United States have ever been held; in their conduct of the nation's affairs, Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, from early 1950 through late 1954, could never act without weighing the effect of their plans upon McCarthy and the forces he led, and in consequence there were times when, because of this man, they could not act at all. He had enormous impact on American foreign policy at a time when that policy bore heavily on the course of world history, and American diplomacy might bear a different aspect today if McCarthy had never lived. In the senate, his headquarters and his hiding place, he assumed the functions of the Committee of the Whole; he lived in thoroughgoing contempt of the Congress of which he was a member, of the rules it had made for itself, and — whenever they ran contrary to his purposes — of the laws enacted for the general welfare.[1]

McCarthy's impact on public policy hardly exhausted his influence. Directly or indirectly he shattered countless lives and seemed to inflict a mood of fear and suspicion on Amer-

ican life as a whole. Rarely has one man in this country cast so long or so dark a shadow.

McCarthy's power, if overwhelming, was comparatively short-lived. But his impact on the intellectual community has lasted far longer. There are those who charge that the McCarthy atmosphere continues to stifle intellectual dissent. But McCarthyism has not so much suppressed opinions as changed them; it has significantly altered the tone of intellectual discussion about politics in general and American politics in particular.

A loosely coherent social theory, substantially concerned with comprehending McCarthyism, emerged in the 1950's. My interest is in that social theory, as it explains McCarthy, as it reinterprets the reform tradition, as it refracts American history through the myopia of a traumatized intelligentsia.

When McCarthy first became prominent, most liberals interpreted the danger he posed in fairly straightforward terms. To them McCarthy was simply the most successful of a number of conservative Republicans capitalizing on the Communist threat to attack the New Deal at home and the Fair Deal abroad. "McCarthyism" was a synonym for smear attacks on liberals, its roots were in traditional right-wing politics, and its principal targets were innocent individuals and liberal political goals. Liberals hardly minimized McCarthy's political importance, although they had little difficulty explaining either his roots or the danger he posed.

But to many writers such traditional analysis failed to account for McCarthy's strength. In their eyes, McCarthy was getting support not from the established groups with which traditional conservatism had been associated but rather from the dispossessed and discontented. One had to wonder about any inevitable association between popular discontent and support for progressive movements of economic reform. Moreover, McCarthy continually appealed to the mass of people for direct support over the heads of their elected leaders. And the established eastern elite, unsympathetic to the

Wisconsin senator, was one of his important targets. All this suggested that popular democracy constituted a real threat to the making of responsible political decisions. McCarthy appeared not in the guise of a conservative smearing innocent liberals but in the guise of a democrat assaulting the political fabric.

If faith in democracy suffered from the McCarthy period, sympathy for radicalism hardly fared better. Both the more orthodox liberal analysts of McCarthyism and those with the newer view recognized that McCarthy dominated America while traditional radical movements lay dormant. To the old-fashioned liberals, McCarthyism symbolized the death of radical protest in America. In the newer view, McCarthy was the bearer of the historical radical mission — challenging, like earlier radicals, the established institutions of American society. The McCarthy years thus ushered in a new fear of radicalism among growing numbers of intellectuals. One can date from the McCarthy period the rise of such terms as "radical Right" to go with radical Left, and left-wing "fundamentalism" to coincide with right-wing extremism.

In this new view, McCarthyism was a movement of the radical Right that grew out of movements of the radical Left. For traditional liberals, the New Deal and contemporary liberalism had grown out of the protest politics of the pre-Roosevelt years. The newer view produced a very different history. Left-wing protest movements, democratic in their appeal to the popular masses, radical in the discontent they mobilized, had borne fruit in McCarthyism. To some, McCarthy was directly descended from an agrarian radical tradition. To others he had conservative roots as well, but his power derived from his ability to form an alliance between traditional conservatism and agrarian radicalism.

The term agrarian radicalism refers to the movements of rural protest that flourished between the end of the Civil War and the New Deal epoch — the Grangers, the Greenbackers, the Farmers' Alliances, the Populists, the progressives, and

the Non-Partisan League. Not all these movements were exclusively rural. Progressivism in particular had an important urban wing, although it is well to remember that in state and national politics progressives most continually triumphed in rural areas.

Aside from being predominantly rural, pre-New Deal protest movements had important geographic sources of continuity. Outside the South, these movements flourished along the settled frontier. From the 1880's to the 1930's, left-wing protest politics were strongest in the West and the western Middle West.[2] Populism outside the South received most of its support from the plains states and those bordering on them. The Non-Partisan League of 1916 to 1924 had been strongest there too. Pre- and post-World War I progressivism tended to be strong in the Middle West and West and weak in the East.

Agrarian radicalism thus flourished in the states of the trans-Mississippi West. Political leaders in these states were most vociferous in their support of McCarthy and supplied him with most of his votes against the senatorial censure resolution of 1954. In particular, senators from states that had supported the Populist presidential candidate in 1892 or La Follette for President in 1924 disproportionately voted against the McCarthy censure.*

* In 1892, Populist presidential candidate Weaver received more than 37 percent of the vote in eight states. All provided at least one vote for McCarthy on the censure resolution. (The only other state in which Weaver received as much as 25 percent of the vote was Alabama.) Cf. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Omaha, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 263.

The coincidence of support for La Follette and McCarthy goes beyond the fact that both were from Wisconsin. In the censure vote, McCarthy got the support of two Republican senators in only five states — Indiana, Idaho, North Dakota, Nevada, and California. In all but Indiana, La Follette had gotten more than 30 percent of the vote in 1923; his national average (by states) was 17 percent. The one Republican senator in seven other states voted against the McCarthy censure. La Follette had exceeded his national average in all seven. Including Wisconsin, McCarthy got support on the censure

Certainly the geographic coincidence of support for McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism can be exaggerated. The South opposed both La Follette and McCarthy, but party loyalty was more crucial than ideological commitment. Since the Populist revolt, agrarian radicalism was not strong in the eastern Middle West; but this area produced strong Republican support for McCarthy. The trans-Mississippi West, however, supported both McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism. A look at the map thus provides concrete evidence linking McCarthy to agrarian radicalism. The interpretation of McCarthy as radical democrat appears persuasive. The new view of politics implied by that interpretation seems supported by the evidence.

The present study challenges the notion that McCarthy had agrarian radical roots. Examination of the empirical evidence finds no correlation between support for agrarian radicals and support for McCarthy; consideration of the reform tradition uncovers no unique reform appeals on which McCarthy capitalized. Investigation of the McCarthy movement discloses no agrarian radical flavor but rather a traditional conservative heritage. Analysis of the new social theory questions its relevance to American history.

Let it be clear at the outset, then, that I do not share the view of McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism presented here and in the chapter following. I only insist that that view be taken seriously. It has gained wide currency in the intellectual world, receiving the support of such prominent and thoughtful writers as Richard Hofstadter, Seymour Martin Lipset, Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, David Riesman, Nathan

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resolution from twenty states. Fourteen of the eighteen states that gave La Follette more than 17 percent of their vote were among those twenty. Cf. Herbert Parzen, "A Comparative Study of the Progressive Presidential Campaigns of 1912 and 1924," unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Political Science, Columbia University, 1926, pp. 1–7; "McCarthy's Strength Centered in West, Midwest," *Congressional Quarterly* (December 3, 1954), p. 1409. No Democrats voted against the censure.

Glazer, Oscar Handlin, Peter Viereck, Will Herberg, Daniel Bell, William Kornhauser.[3] Before they wrote, McCarthyism meant something like character assassination, and Populism was the name of a particular historical movement for social reform at the end of the nineteenth century. Through their influence Populism has become an example of and a general term for anomic movements of mass protest against existing institutions — the type of movement typified by McCarthyism.

Those connecting it with the earlier movements see McCarthyism, first, as a democratic revolt of dispossessed groups against the educated, eastern elite. Like McCarthyism, agrarian radicalism is also said to have substituted moralistic, irrational appeals for a rational politics. For many writers, these movements embody a nativist mystique which, glorifying the ordinary folk, threatens the civilized restraints of a complex society.

For these writers, both movements "reject the traditional cultural and educational leadership of the enlightened upper and upper-middle classes." Populism and La Follette progressivism identified the will of the people with justice and morality. Holding a plebiscitarian view of democracy, agrarian radicals placed the popular will above the autonomy of institutions and the desires of the various strata in the society. Since political leaders cannot function in an atmosphere of plebiscites and exposures, agrarian radicalism crippled responsible political leadership and endangered privacy. In this sense, "McCarthy is the heir of La Follette." McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism exhibit "the tendency to convert issues into ideologies, to invest them with moral color and high emotional charge [which] invites conflict which can only damage a society." "Beneath the sane economic demands of the Populists of 1880–1890 seethed a mania of xenophobia, Jew-baiting, intellectual baiting, and thought-controlling lynch spirit." McCarthyism is the "same old isolationist, Anglophobe, Germanophile revolt of radical Populist lunatic-

fringers against the eastern, educated, Anglicized elite." "McCarthyism appealed to the same social groups as did 'left-wing' Populism."[4]

Clearly such charges rest on a particular view of politics — one involving suspicion of the people, fear of radicalism, friendliness to established institutions, re-examination of the American past. The fear of mass democracy and radical protest that grew in the McCarthy years eventuated in theories of mass society and pluralism. Much of the effort to connect McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism appears mysterious until the theories which underlie that effort are comprehended. Moreover, in the light of the new theories the problem of McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism transcends its particular historical significance and becomes relevant to general questions of social change and democratic politics.

The aim of this study, then, is fourfold. There is first the effort to comprehend and criticize a dominant strand of social science theory. That effort opens and closes the book and provides the backdrop for the arguments of the historical and statistical chapters. There is, second, in Chapter 2, such discussion of American operating political ideas as seems necessary to frame the analyses of McCarthyism and agrarian radicalism. There is, third, a reinterpretation of American reform, informed by the analysis of voting returns in three states (Chapters 3 to 5) and the explicit subject of Chapters 6 and 7. There is, finally, the analysis of McCarthyism. The statistical chapters seek to discover whether agrarian radicalism created a tradition of political support that moved from Populism, progressivism, or the Non-Partison League into right-wing Republicanism in general or McCarthyism in particular. Chapter 8 then discusses the nature of the McCarthy phenomenon.

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CHAPTER ONE

RADICALISM AND THE RATIONAL SOCIETY: THE PLURALIST VIEW

The Social Roots

Modern pluralism emerged as American intellectuals, mainly ex-radical, responded to the events of their youth and the pressures of the 1950's. The rise of communism and fascism in Europe had forcefully suggested the similarities between the extreme Right and the extreme Left and the dangers of mass movements. The moderate New Deal, on the other hand, succeeded in giving American capitalism a reasonable and stable basis. Thus drastic social change seemed not only terribly dangerous but also unnecessary.

But many of the thinkers with whom we are concerned remained critical of American society as a whole through World War II, perhaps sustained by the hopes for a new world pervasive during that war as during the previous one. These hopes soon exhausted themselves as the cold war and the rise of McCarthyism finally deadened the radical impulses of the pluralists:[1] the country now had to be defended against attack from without and within. McCarthy threatened the stability of the society to which the pluralists were becoming reconciled; in his attack on intellectuals he threatened the rapprochement itself. The pluralists now sought values in traditions of mainstream America with which they could