

## MCGILL AND CONSERVATISM (Originally published September 1965)

We learned last month on reading a column of Ralph McGill's that "... 'conservatism' and 'conservatives' were once meaningful words. Today they have been taken over by an irrational and irresponsible fringe that has wrapped itself in the toga of 'conservatism.'" To McGill's (intentionally?) jaundiced eye, the term has been appropriated by a "weird minority," and he conveniently equates "extremism on the far right" with conservatism.

He has written many columns on extremists and extremism, both of which, almost unflinching, exist nearly exclusively in that broad classification of thought and activity to the starboard of McGill. Turn about is apparently not fair play, as we have yet to read a column of McGill's in which he identifies the communists, bearded beatniks, unwashed weirdos and kooks of the extreme left with his own liberalism.

For a man of stature and sincerity, who has received national and international acclaim as the Southern voice of enlightenment, benignity and tolerance, it is strange to find him intolerant to the extreme of continually attempting to destroy the meaning of conservatism. His preoccupation with the subject might lead one to believe that he fears it more than communism or death itself. If it has indeed become a disreputable term, McGill has helped to make it so by use of the same smear tactics he decries in his extremists of the far right.

As a favored member of the press elite, McGill has been a prominent follower and advisor of Presidents from Roosevelt to Johnson. Some of his critics feel his coloring can adjust to that of an administration with the instinctive adaptability of a chameleon. Not too long ago, before the ascendancy of the Kennedy star, we remember he was very favorably inclined toward Richard Nixon, when it seemed likely that Nixon might one day become the Chief Executive. Later, the Kennedys, with the aid of Johnson in the South, changed his mind, and if he had ever loved Nixon, it was not apparent in his columns after that. At present he is solidly wedded to Lyndon Johnson, the Consensus and the Great Society.

When the Johnson Era is no more, and the remnants of the Great Society are turned into a shambles by the predictable splintering of the Democratic Party into factions struggling for the pieces, it is not entirely impossible that reaction will set in and true conservatism may find a leader to bring it into power. And in the foreground, beating the cymbals for a New and Progressive, Dynamic Conservatism, very likely will stand that old chameleon, Ralph McGill.

We should all live that long?