

TRIUMPH



A NOVEL

BY JOHN KENNETH

GALBRAITH

John Kenneth Galbraith

THE TRIUMPH

A Novel
of Modern Diplomacy

BOSTON
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THE TRIUMPH

Also by John Kenneth Galbraith

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The Great Crash, 1929

The Affluent Society

The Liberal Hour

Economic Development

The Scotch

The New Industrial State

For Averell Harriman

Explanation . . .

THIS IS A STORY I have tried to tell before in articles and lectures. But it has occurred to me that maybe there are truths that best emerge from fiction. I did hesitate to describe this small fable as a novel; there is, as the reader will discover, too much attempted instruction by the author. Perhaps Truman Capote would wish to call it a non-novel novel.

None of the characters in this book is imaginary; all have been assembled in bits and pieces from people I have known in public life. But the pieces were much too small for anyone to be recognized as a living person. I say this for it would be a waste of time for anyone to go fishing here for his friends, his enemies or even himself. Nor would I wish it thought that I was using a fable to say things I would not otherwise put in print. As some will be aware, I have not, in recent years, been wholly reticent as a critic of our foreign policy.

J.K.G.

THE TRIUMPH

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IN WHAT IS STILL CALLED the New State Department Building in Washington, the offices of the highest officials are on the seventh floor. And the very highest officials — the Secretary and the two Under Secretaries who are concerned with diplomacy as distinct from the man who posts people to jobs, prepares the budget and insures the security of communications — are in a small enclave with its own small corridor, access to which is protected by a receptionist who stops all visitors and politely inquires as to their business, making an exception only of a few favored officials whom she knows. These, from her desk in the large foyer, she greets by name or title — Mr. Nitze, Mr. Helms, Mr. Ambassador — as they stride by and disappear along the small corridor just mentioned.

The building was completed during the secretaryship of Mr. John Foster Dulles, and much of his personality and more of his policy are reflected in this suite of offices. The offices themselves are vast and paneled in dark mahogany, and there is so much of it as, somewhat unfor-

tunately, to suggest a rather thin veneer of plywood, and the eye searches unconsciously for cracks. The furniture is heavy and the leather very brown and official. In addition to the receptionist the entrance to the suite is guarded by two giant blocks of white marble. Each must weigh several tons. Nearby, somewhat irrelevantly, is a handsome grandfather's clock. Lining the walls of the small corridor are oil portraits of past Secretaries of State. Until the time of William Jennings Bryan these have a certain dignity; thereafter they deteriorate rapidly in quality and style, and that of James F. Byrnes slightly suggests a fugitive from justice and Edward R. Stettinius, one who has just been apprehended. Dean Acheson looks spiritual and surprised. The general effect, not alone of the portraits, is hideous and admirably reflects Mr. Dulles's conviction that diplomacy pays no homage to lesser art. Nothing need serve the purposes of grace or decoration; everything should be to impress or possibly to intimidate. Elsewhere in the building, where these effects are not required, the aspect is very different — rather that of an unusually well-staffed hospital.

An exception is a small room on the eighth floor — a floor used not for offices but for official receptions, state luncheons and dinners and other occasions of high protocol. Here also is the executive dining room. It is of modest size, simply furnished and rather cheerful — there are small tables for two along the walls and larger ones toward the middle. From the ample windows one can see the Potomac and the Pentagon. The food, like the furniture, is functional. No alcohol, not even beer, is served,

and diplomats back from abroad for consultation find it a relief from the cocktails, canapés, the succession of courses, and wines, and the coffee and brandy without which, at any meal in line of duty, the dignity of a great nation would not be upheld.

The very highest officials of the Department do not eat their lunch in the pleasant room on the top floor, and this poses a small problem for the officials just below. The Secretary, the Under Secretary and any Assistant Secretary who has a serious problem on his hands are much too busy for the leisurely and congenial ways of a restaurant. Lunch is a time for an intense tête-à-tête with some other official, a *tour d'horizon* with a visiting foreign minister, for conveying, as they are called, the hard facts of life to the ambassador of some friendly but, as seen by the State Department, politically retarded nation, or for catching up with urgent memoranda and telegrams. All are best accomplished over a tray in one's own office. Or these men are commanded to the White House for obeisance to a visiting potentate or to a foreign embassy for the same purpose, from which they return feeling a trifle hazy and overfed. The most senior officials being so occupied, a slightly lesser man loses caste if his meal seems to be without urgency. So, quite often, he has a sandwich and some coffee brought to his office, and he consumes them all by himself while occupying himself with research reports and congressional testimony he does not need to

read. This prudence is required especially of men of the rank of Assistant Secretary. As late as Roosevelt's time there were only two in the entire Department of State, and so great was their distinction that one of them, Raymond Moley, never ceased to believe that his views were entitled to rather greater respect than those of the President himself. Now the *Congressional Directory* lists no fewer than nine officers of this title, and as many more are thought to have the same rank and pay. This dilution has had its inevitable effect; those who hold the office sense the danger of their descending into the official proletariat. It is wise to take precautions.

And yet the dining room, apart from providing nourishment in a pleasant and calming atmosphere, serves an important public function. One can there acquire or offer information too speculative to be presented in the Secretary's morning staff meeting, or to be circulated as a piece of paper, or to appear in a telegram, or which hasn't been sufficiently certified so that it can go into the weekly intelligence summaries circulated by the CIA. And such information is vital, for what comes in these regular sources of information is what one already knows. A man who lunches alone does not pick up that first glimmering hint of great events ahead. Nor does he acquire a reputation as a man who foresees such events. Certainly if something important seems to be in the wind, he is wise to risk his reputation and go to the executive dining room.

Something — perhaps not much — was in the wind on the day this history begins. For nearly a fortnight, or more, there had been rumors of a revolution in Puerto

Santos. Now the papers told of actual fighting. Puerto de los Santos, to accord this nation its full grammatical dignity, is not an important country. But it is the peculiar, and perhaps the unique, genius of American diplomacy that it regularly brings great if somewhat temporary importance to highly unimportant lands. This it has done for Laos, the Dominican Republic, most notably for Vietnam, and for the Congo, Yemen, Thailand and Panama. All with a legitimate concern for Latin American affairs, and everyone with an interest in Central American and Caribbean questions, were more than a little on the alert.

“What’s your assessment of our situation in P.S.?” The question came from a small, slight man with a long intelligent face, unkempt hair flecked with gray and a tweed jacket which, although at some sacrifice of elegance, concealed the dandruff. He put the question hurriedly before the menu had been quite circulated, for it was evident that he wanted to get the conversation on a firm professional track. Worth Campbell, to whom the question was addressed, looked reflectively at the small man for a moment or two.

No one doubted that he was the man to be questioned and to answer. Others might have opinions; Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and U.S. Coordinator, Alliance for Progress, Dr. Grant Worthing Campbell had a position. When he did answer, his voice was nicely modulated, mellow, confident and attractive. It went well with his white hair, high forehead and smooth, pink, almost youthful complexion. Only his eyes,

rather small and obviously a trifle infirm behind their rimless spectacles, were out of keeping. They had a schoolmasterish, some would say slightly querulous, quality.

"You make the country sound like an afterthought. Maybe it was meant to be. I'd say yes and no. Anyhow, that's a good diplomatic answer!"

"What I mean is, can the Obregón administration in your judgment survive?"

"Martínez, it is really." The voice was now almost deliberately gentle. "You scholars in Policy Planning must remember that while the Spaniards are nice to their mothers they use their father's name for everyday. You have seen the same telegrams I have. Pethwick believes Martínez has the strength to ride this one out. Over the longer run the picture isn't so clear. But then in the long run we are all dead. That was Keynes, wasn't it?"

The others at the table obviously approved the estimate, and several bowed in agreement. But the little man was not quite finished. "Our preliminary analyses in PP show that there are considerable grounds for dissatisfaction down there."

"There probably are. And you can never tell how much more is boiling just below the surface. But so far the old man has kept things pretty well under control. And, everything considered, he's been a good friend of ours. The Communists don't like him, and he's been willing to put up with quite a lot from some of our well-meaning people. I'd be the first to admit that some of his methods aren't entirely to our liking."

An AID man, the Assistant Administrator for Program,

Material Resources and Finance, had pulled his chair over from an adjacent table. The Assistant Secretary turned to him: "Remind us what we've got going down there now, John."

"The military program you know about. We have two pilot programs on land reform. We have just finished programming a new contract with Texas A. & M. for a college-of-agriculture project. There's a fishing project and related cold storage program. That's about all. The *campesinos* divided up our experimental farm when they tried to move onto the big estates in the high country in '60. Martínez decided to let them keep our property. He said it showed that he accepted a land reform program in principle."

"There's also the budget support?"

"Christ, yes! There is also the budget support! With the military, that is *the* program. Every time Pethwick has seen Martínez in the past two years it has cost us another \$5 million. He keeps needing more and getting less — except from us."

"Well, it hasn't been a bad investment — so far." As the others again bowed in agreement a man across the table caught Worth Campbell's eye.

"Doctor, how would you appraise Puerto Santos from the standpoint of free world security?" The questioner was a slender good-looking man of about forty with short blond hair and a rugged, healthy face. In contrast with the man from Policy Planning, he wore a neat, almost natty, blue pinstripe. He looked extremely clean.

"That's really your department — Colonel Massey, isn't

it? I assume the Air Force has a pretty good view. We certainly don't want the Communists stepping over Rostow's truce line in that part of the world. It would give our comrade friends a new chance in Guatemala and Venezuela, maybe Colombia. We have to remember that not all the dominoes are in Asia. And there is always the Canal to think about."

"Would you say that there is an alternative to this President Martínez, Doctor?"

"There are always alternatives, Colonel — that's my experience in Latin America, anyhow. But they are not always better and sometimes a lot worse, and no one can tell which will be which. So you stand by what friends you have — or you should. I wish more of our people understood that simple law of life."

"Mr. Secretary, your secretary is on the line." It was the head waitress. Worth Campbell had a fleeting sense of relief. There was a question whether he should be here conducting a seminar at this particular time.

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In his outer office, William (Bill) O'Donnell was waiting with the telegram.

"I estimate that this piece of shit will hit the fan upstairs in about one hour. I figured you might want a little head start."

The Assistant Secretary looked at O'Donnell with what he hoped was well-concealed repugnance. How he disliked the man. Irishmen and Catholics were comparatively rare in the Foreign Service. Once a monopoly of

white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, it had become a comfortable coalition of these and socially concerned Jews. So it was possible that O'Donnell, in addition to all else, had to be forgiven for a form of minority assertiveness. But Worth Campbell preferred to believe that his manners compensated for a fairly mediocre career. O'Donnell was nearing forty and still a Class III officer. His present post, Acting Director of the Office of Central American and Caribbean Affairs, considering all of the strategic areas of American interest in the world, was pretty far down. In fact, O'Donnell did worry about this at times but not as much as might have been expected. Most aspects of his adult life had seemed an improvement over his early existence as one of the four sons of a Santa Fe section foreman from whose toiling minions he had learned his fluent and highly idiomatic Spanish. The O'Donnell children already showed signs of being more impatient.

In State Department usage the priority classification "Emergency" is one grade below that of "Critic" which is reserved for an outbreak of war or its equivalent. The telegram was as follows:

SECRET

Flores, P.S.

Emergency Limit Distribution

SEC STATE
WASHINGTON

HAVE JUST COMPLETED DETAILED URGENT COUNTRY TEAM
REVIEW ALL ASPECTS LOCAL SITUATION. THOUGH SOME
FEATURES UNCLEAR REMAIN CONFIDENT FUNDAMENTAL