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On Fooling People

Richard M. Nixon's new book "My Six Great Crises" gives an interesting account of international intrigue and the ballot box. It serves a purpose in exposing the machinations of government plotting and proves the dictum that "you can fool some of the people some of the time but you can fool all of the people all of the time."

But it shows that governments — even democratic ones — are not above fooling people as long as they can. This is not unique to the United States. In similar forms, the attempt to keep the public ill-informed, or worse, to mislead public opinion exists in many high places.

In dealing with the American-sponsored intervention in Cuba, Nixon, at the time vice-president and Republican candidate for the presidency, recounts a secret briefing given by Allen W. Dulles, then the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Kennedy, Nixon's rival, according to the book, attended. The purpose was to acquaint both parties of state department policy then underway.

Nixon, of course, as a member of the executive was party to the plot to overthrow Castro. He says he was astounded later in the campaign to hear Kennedy advocate in a public speech what already was the "covert" U.S. policy. Nixon saw this as jeopardizing the secret enterprise and to protect it, he now recounts, he was forced to denounce what Kennedy openly espoused.

Nixon in his campaign speeches called Kennedy's proposals for Cuban intervention "the most dangerous, irresponsible recommendation." He said

such intervention would violate U.S. treaty obligations, "we would lose all of our friends in Latin America, we probably would be condemned in the United Nations . . . it would be an open invitation to Mr. Khrushchev . . . to come into Latin America and engage us in what would be a civil war and probably even worse than that."

Nixon laments that during the campaign he was thus thrust into the "ironic position of appearing to be softer on Castro than Kennedy."

When we recall the ill-fated Cuban intervention, and the denials and evasion of responsibility which originally cloaked the sordid mess, it is not beyond understanding those who plotted it would have chosen to keep it secret. This in itself is bad enough but to manipulate public opinion with actual lying at the executive level, such as Nixon employed, is an admission of perverting the principles of democratic government.

For an administration to make decisions, misguided as they may be, but presumably believed to be in the public interests, is the responsibility of leadership. To deliberately misinform the public brings into question the value of that leadership.

Mr. Nixon by his own words has exposed the calibre of his own political philosophy. He obviously employed the election tactics of a county dogcatcher in the realm of world affairs even while he was vice-president. Now, Allen Dulles has denied that President Kennedy had been briefed on Cuba. This, no doubt, will be disputed but one thing is clear, the best man won the presidency.