

tain nostalgia for the old rural ways and values as portrayed by James Whitcomb Riley, but they undoubtedly liked to laugh at the hicks, oddballs and monsters who scamper zantly or lumber clumsily through Fox's panels. As audience, they are represented by those side-holding laughers and head-scratching wonderers dressed in business suits and felt hats who stand on the sideline of each exploding, anarchistic episode.

Depending on the psychological critic you read, laughter is cruel or laughter is sane and restorative. Laughter, like the Trolley and the cultural occasions which inspired it, is a complex thing. Perhaps

the readers of *The Toonerville Trolley* laughed all the harder because they themselves had so narrowly missed the Great American Fate of becoming another small-town freak, and in laughing they asserted their own suburban normalcy. But when they laughed at the Trolley and its irascible Motorman, they were participating in the very spirit of misrule that those boondock freaks, from Sut Lovingood on down to Li'l Abner, have perpetually symbolized for emerging, modern, schematized and scheduled America. For that reason, if for no other, it is sad, very sad, that the Toonerville Trolley doesn't stop here anymore.

John Seelye

The Great Surrender

The New Republic

Who Runs Congress?

Ralph Nader Congress Project

by Mark J. Green, James M. Fallows
and David R. Zwick

(Bantam; \$1.95)

Who Runs Congress? was put together in less than eight weeks by three of Ralph Nader's most trusted Raiders and facile writers—Mark J. Green, James M. Fallows and David R. Zwick. It is a highly readable and often entertaining cataloging of congressional sin, arrogance, ineffectiveness and unresponsiveness, but it is unpedantic and, in Mark Green's own words, "makes no attempt at depth." Many young political science professors and lawyers who are team leaders of Nader studies on congressional committees and procedures feared that this book would unfairly and incorrectly anticipate their own substantive findings and proposals. It doesn't. Most of the materials are already familiar to serious Washington-watchers. The book is aimed rather at stirring casual citizens to an awareness, as Nader says in his introduction, of "what they've lost to Congress so that they can take more of it back for the good of themselves, their fellow citizens, and their children. For the people

have indeed abdicated their power, their money and their democratic birthright to Congress. As a result, without the participation of the people, Congress has surrendered its enormous authority and resources to special interest groups, waste, insensitivity, ignorance and bureaucracy." Not that the project itself is a casual one. It may indeed be Nader's most ambitious project so far, and has mobilized through the summer and into the fall 1250 volunteers and staff to produce in all 21,000 pages of studies on every aspect of Congress. This 300-page paperback is a small part of the whole but, Nader feels, a crucial one. He hopes that it will do for congressional reform what *Unsafe at Any Speed* has done for auto safety, though he is willing to concede that it is more difficult to get people worked up about a distant institution than bugs in the family car.

Nader makes a persuasive case that the nation is in the midst of a "grave constitutional crisis" stemming from a

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breakdown of separation and balance of powers. He views Congress as having been constitutionally ordained the pre-eminent branch of government by virtue of its closeness and accountability to the people and its role as shaper of the other two branches through the creation of agencies and the appointment of judges.

The book details how Congress has abdicated this power to its "three rulers"—committee chairmen, special



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interest groups and the President. Chairmen, perpetuated by seniority and by generous campaign contributions from vested interests, are seen as unassailable because of their tight control of subcommittees and staff, their manipulation of the rules and their ability to bestow favors on lesser members. The lobbies "derive their strategic advantage by controlling the flow of information in and out of Congress." And the President's role as a ruler of Congress is made possible by congressional abdication of its warmaking power, its role as an initiator of bills and of a legislative program, its control of the budget and appropriated funds, and its responsibility to oversee the actions of the executive branch.

These findings are hard to quarrel with, as are the described causes of congressional abdication, the greatest of which is Congress' inability to gather independent information. In fact, each of the three "rulers" of Congress have achieved most of their power by means of accumulating and manipulating information. Committee chairmen can and often do keep members in the dark about the status of major bills and the direction of committee initiatives. Lobbies, with their ability to specialize, overwhelm members who must somehow cover an enormous range of issues. And the executive branch, which outguns the Congress by 4000 computers to one, is often the sole source of information on the programs which it asks the Congress to approve and finance.

Nader wants Congress to become its own independent source of information by hiring more staff; computerizing its operations; making greater use of its own investigative arm, the Government Accounting Office, and resurrecting its watchdog role by once again making oversight hearings a regular congressional function.

A basic reason the Congress does not assert its prerogatives, Nader contends, is that its members put the business of getting reelected ahead of the business of Congress. The spiraling costs of campaigning make members all the more beholden to special interests. And just as insidious is what Nader terms the "trivialization" of the congressional office into a clearinghouse for constituent complaints for the simple reason that careful attention to these complaints has become a proven method of getting reelected. Nader does not belittle the importance of providing this service, but he wants it done by someone other than the members—perhaps

a congressional ombudsman—so that the members can devote full time to legislation and oversight.

Although Nader assures his reader that the reclaiming and reforming of Congress "should not have to be the equivalent of reaching for the stars," the reader by book's end may well conclude that the task is every bit that astronomical. For that reason, perhaps, the book closes with a chapter on "Taking on Congress: A Primer on Citizen Action." It is actually a condensed version of a "Handbook for Citizens" written by Douglas W. Cassell, Jr., another Nader Raider, and to be published next year as part of the Congress Project.

Nader's call for citizen action suggests such involvement as writing letters that will be read, drafting bills that will be introduced and pursued, organizing community groups that will be heard and challenging congressmen at election time. Not surprisingly, the greatest stress is placed on citizen organization along with the successful lines of Nader-inspired Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs).

But it is at this point that *Who Runs Congress?* suddenly runs out of steam. Nader's reliance on citizen organization seems inadequate to the task of reforming Congress. So does his proposal—made at a press conference last week announcing the book—that the Congress call itself into special session at the end of next year "for the sole purpose of studying and legislating congressional reform." Both approaches assume that the Congress, as it is presently constituted, is capable of meaningful and basic reform. With all due respect to Mr. Nader, it just doesn't wash, and there are indications that he realizes it.

There is but one way to accomplish the sort of sweeping reforms Nader is seeking in leadership, committee jurisdiction, seniority, rules, campaign finance, interest-group disclosure, office procedures and information gathering. To change the Congress, you must change the members—or at least enough of the members so that the others get the message.

Nader appreciates the power of the citizen's ultimate weapon—his vote—but he seems unwilling to marshal it to the full extent. True, he has caused a furor on Capitol Hill—especially among his liberal congressional friends—by planning to release the Congress project profiles on individual members just three weeks before election day. But he insists that he is not engaging in

"Prophet With Honor"*

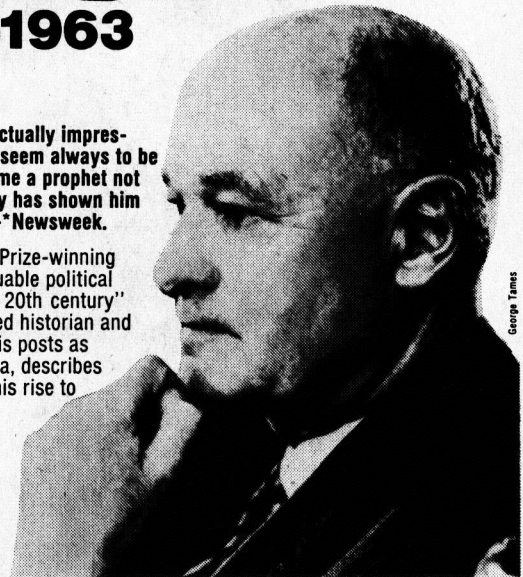
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partisan election politics, but rather simply giving the people a chance to evaluate their legislators during the pre-election period of peak interest in the Congress. The nuance escapes most of the members; many see the timing of the profiles as a challenge to their survival.

Nader has designed the profiles to be objective, not evaluative, because he wants the voter to make up his own mind on whether individual members are deserving of reelection. Influencing voters to vote a certain way, he insists, "does not mix" with organizing them and informing them. But if Environmental Action can name a "Dirty Dozen" congressmen most worthy of defeat on the single issue of conservation (and succeed in knocking off seven of them in 1970 and two already in primaries this year, including House Interior Committee Chairman Aspinall), why can't Ralph Nader name a "Horrible Hundred" on an issue as basic and sweeping as congressional reform?

Nader is a much-feared man on Capitol Hill for the very reason that his credibility is so high among the voters. He should put that credibility to maximum use by exhibiting less profile and more courage on congressional reform.

Paul Leventhal

In Brief

The Dynamics of Creation
by Anthony Storr

(Atheneum; \$7.95)

Anthony Storr is not, one suspects, clinical enough in his new volume to satisfy professional psychoanalysts; he is certainly not literary enough to satisfy literary critics. He has set out to produce an integrative statement, ranging through the psychic world of artists and other intelligences advertised as creative, and trying to diagnose the many different motives that drive them to creation; but in the process he does not, though he tries to, deviate much from the standard Freudian explanation for creative acts, that they are in one way or another compensatory for failures, unhappinesses, frustrations in "real" life. Nor does he provide what Freud himself was always at great pains to provide—detailed case histories or analyses of literary works to back up