

A CITIZEN IN POLITICS

Paul Y. Hammond

George Romney and Michigan. By Richard C. Fuller,
New York: Vantage Press, 1966. 119 pp. \$2.75.



Michigan State House

Paul Hammond, who is now with the Rand Corporation, has taught political science at Yale and Columbia. He is the author of *Organizing for Defense: The American Military Establishment in the Twentieth Century*.

This little book is about George Romney's introduction into public life and politics in Michigan. The partisanship of the author, an aide in the 1962 gubernatorial campaign, is meticulously restrained, but never out of sight. A modest, unpretentious effort, the book is a simple and rather narrow journalistic summary of Romney's involvement and victory in the 1962 race. It lacks stature either as biography or as political analysis, but is a serviceable reference to a subject of growing contemporary interest.

As a campaign aide, the author could observe Romney first hand, yet he treats us to only a few glimpses of Romney close up. He interprets Romney mostly through the writings of other journalists. Fuller states that his book is an attempt to answer questions asked him "in interviewing hundreds of people during the Romney Campaign," questions such as "Why does a good clean guy like Romney want to get into a dirty racket like politics?" (He does not answer the question.) A first-rate piece of journalism could tell us more about Romney and his motivations on the basis of a two-hours' interview than Fuller has. The misfortune for Mr. Fuller's readers is that he might have given us so much more — an illuminating impression of Romney based on more exposure to him than any other journalist is likely to get for a long time.

Fuller reports his belief that "his religion is the key" to Romney (p. 23). Let us be clear about it: we have here one Mormon writing about another. The statement that religion is the key to the man simply falls flat in Fuller's explanation of Romney's politics. Romney's "belief in the fundamental worth of the individual as God's greatest creation," Fuller writes, "which belief supplied the theoretical basis of Citizens for Michigan and much of his political platform, can be traced to his Mormon religion. Phrases and ideas involving these tenets will invariably crop up in a political discussion with George Romney" (p. 23). The trouble is that Romney and the Mormons are not the only ones in the United States who believe in the "fundamental worth of the individual as God's greatest creation." One has not said very much, therefore, to say that this belief "supplied the theoretical basis of Citizens for Michigan." Moreover, the CFM has not been the distinctive amateur political group which Fuller's statement would imply. "Non-partisan" politics has a long and rich history in the United States. It helps to mark the limits of partisanship (which are essential to mark, as moderate Republicans learned if they had forgotten it, at the Republican National Convention in 1964). Romney's CFM may have some claim to distinction because it was not organized to conduct electoral campaigns but to effect program and policy changes. But so was the League of Women's Voters, organized just after World War I.

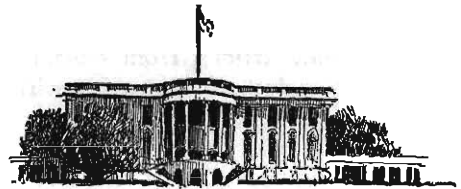
Although, as I have said, partisanship is restrained, the book adopts all the major postulates of Romney's position. Fuller says that Romney repre-

sents a new Republican force. Yet Fuller abandons to their critics, as Romney did in 1962, the old guard Republicans who controlled the legislature. According to Fuller, Romney was an underdog, fighting an entrenched Democratic machine. He played down his partisan Republican label, faced a supposedly solid front of labor support for the Democrats, and won with less than a 3% margin. There is no discussion of the fact that he did little for his party. This partisan failing, which Romney has attempted to redress with great efforts in his 1966 campaign, is referred to only in the comment that no other Republican won a statewide executive office in 1962, so that Romney's "cabinet" members were all Democrats.

The picture Fuller draws of the incumbent Governor Swainson's campaign organization is of an extraordinarily weak and ineffectual operation, based entirely on labor unions, which in the end Romney substantially breaches. Fuller's description is at variance with his claim that Romney was the underdog. Rather, it leaves one to wonder why Romney did not win much more decisively. He seemed to be running against a house of cards. Perhaps Fuller has missed this incongruity because he characterizes Romney as the Governor did himself in the campaign (a characterization mostly related to his own strategic position in Michigan politics) that is, as the amateur, non-partisan citizen running against a powerful party machine around which are clustered selfish "interests."

Doubtless Romney looked good from a non-partisan viewpoint in the 1962 campaign. The amateur up against professionals always does — at least to middle-class voters who are alienated from the professionals. But it is difficult to believe that his campaign was run completely without dealing with the interests as interests. Maybe that is the truth. Maybe he really is the honest man on the white horse. Fuller suggests as much, though not insistently, in his introduction. But he has not provided us with the evidence to sustain the point in his book. In presenting his case for Romney versus the interests, he has failed to tell us much about how Romney came to grips with Michigan politics. He has given us a warm and colorful hero, but one who is mounted on cardboard.

Romney would be foolish not to play what is left, after his 1966 electoral victory, of his amateur standing for what it is now worth in Michigan and national politics. But he is now, unavoidably, a professional, competing with other "pros" in a process requiring highly cultivated skills. The large question which his career now poses is whether he can assemble and exploit the quite different resources he will need to operate successfully in national politics — for example, a personal staff competent in foreign policy and non-Michigan state politics. A book which addressed the 1962 campaign as the early phase of the professionalization of Romney, rather than in the false dichotomy of the amateur vs. the professionals, would have distinct limitations for anyone now interested in Romney's presidential aspirations. But it could illuminate Romney's initial adaptation to political life at the state level, and possibly something about his capacity to develop into the wholly professional politician which Presidential politics demands.



The White House