

# America's 3rd Force

By ROBERT SEGAL

For those a slight space left-of-center, Common Cause---the modern brain child of a Republican, John W. Gardner---may prove in the 1970's as satisfying as the old Fight For Freedom was in the 1940's. If you think not, take the trouble to sit in on a session arranged by John Gardner the next time you get that opportunity.

Common Cause is a collection of nearly 200,000 Americans paying \$15 on a non-tax exempt basis with the broad aim of trying to take the country away from the professional politicians in the hope that the people will pick up the pieces and move on from there.

"We are trying to bring the individual back to where he has access to his own institutions," Gardner has said. "We want to open the doors and windows and let the people in. We want to put this country back on the path to greatness."

Soapy rhetoric? Don't be too sure.

Some people critical of Gardner and Common Cause hunch that Gardner, who resigned as President Johnson's Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare because of his opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam, has in the

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back of his mind a try at the office of President. He's not too old---58---and surely not too naive. He has service as a Captain in the Marine Corps during World War II on his credentials list; he has a Ph.D. from the University of California; he has held top academic positions in psychology; and he has proved effectiveness as an executive of the Carnegie Corporation and as a former chairman of Urban Coalition.

Other Common Cause detractors contend that Common Cause will get nowhere because it fears offending its active members. These critics are sure that as Common Causes try to modernize government, keep the environment viable, and combat poverty, the movement will develop severe immobility. (Thus far it hasn't).

Eugene McCarthy, a friend of John Gardner, wisecracks about Common Cause as "an organization without a past or a future and with a dubious present."

Others have likened Common Cause to the Barnburners, the radical bloc of Democrats of 1843 to 1848 who backed Sam Tilden and Martin Van Buren. The American Barnburners

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(seemingly determined to destroy the rats by setting fire to the stable) were accused of threatening to destroy corporations and public works by hammering away at the abuses inherent therein.

Despite all such criticism, Common Cause buzzes on its way. It concentrates on a few issues at a time, using legitimate lobbying tactics and inspiring its members to buttonhole office holders who have votes to cast. Not long ago, Common cause tried mightily to undo the Congressional seniority system. More recently, the Gardner outfit has won a court ruling enabling Common Cause to stay in the battle to force the major political parties to abide by the legal limits of \$5000 per contribution and \$3,000,000 spending per year by a party.

Up to now, John Gardner has attracted financial backing from the IBM's Watsons, John D. Rockefeller III, John Hay Whitney, and Dreyfus Fund's Howard Stein among others. It has also attracted top flight professionals like Lowell Beck, Common Cause Executive Director, and former lobbyist for the American Bar Association.



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