

HUMOR IN MODERATION (Originally published December 1966)

Whatever the final outcome here in Georgia, the general elections last month were attended by some unsurpassed political comedy, particularly in the realm of the communications media.

One week before the Georgia election and shortly after its sister paper, the *Atlanta Journal*, came out in support of Callaway, the *Constitution* devoted two full-page columns of editorial space to its decision to chicken out. After much momentous soul-searching and tortured rationalization from its position as a “moderate” the paper decided that it could not decide. It backed off from the write-in vote for Arnall, which, initially, it instigated and encouraged. It thought Maddox unqualified to hold the governorship. It would not vote for Callaway, “a strong well-meaning man of conviction,” because it was afraid of strong men with strong convictions (i.e. convictions which did not agree with those of the *Constitution*). In spite of its own defection, the paper “remained confident as always in the public’s capacity to make the best choice available to them.” The *Constitution’s* performance reminded us of the petulant, willful child who, sensing that the contest has gone against him, picks up his marbles and announces that the game doesn’t count. In probably one of the most hilarious statements of the year, the paper congratulated itself on its impartial indecision by saying, “No problem would exist for a blindly partisan paper.”

Two of the leading composite characters, biting caricatures in Allen Drury’s latest political novel, *Capable of Honor*, are Walter Dobius (Walter Wonderful), a nationally acclaimed pontifical, journalist-pundit, and Frankly Unctuous, TV’s most noted news commentator and analyst. In the press and on TV last month, we were treated to performances by several real-life counterparts who seemed determined to outdo their caricatures. From Mr. Cronkite and our former classmate, Howard K. Smith, of CBS and ABC (the only two networks viewable locally) we got the impression that there are no longer any leftists and socialists and mighty few liberals remaining. Now there are only “moderates” who contend valiantly against everything to their starboard, a spectrum that includes Southern Democrats, Republicans, conservatives, rightists, segregationists, racists, far rightists, radical rightists, fascists and extremists. The self-styled “moderates” have moved the center-stripe at the middle so far onto the left shoulder of the road that much of the traffic is now occupying all of the pavement. This may be a good place for the liberal-leftist “moderates”; if the traffic gets heavier, they may have trouble avoiding the ditch running parallel alongside.