

Spotlight on candidate Spock

The famed pediatrician, now turned politician, is running seriously but doesn't expect many doctors' votes

The only doctor who is a candidate for President of the United States in this election expects very few votes from physicians. He won't even get his own. And he favors the election of Sen. George McGovern over President Nixon.

These paradoxes are more apparent than real. Dr. Benjamin Spock, author of *Baby and Child Care* and Presidential candidate of the People's Party, expects very few votes, period. Whatever his modest potential on November 7 may be, it will be further reduced by the fact that restrictive state laws have enabled him to get on the ballot in only ten states. Any votes from doctors, he says, will be "particularly gratifying." But he knows that his opposition to the Vietnam war and the other social and political ideas he has advocated have raised the hackles of most members of the medical profession, although he adds: "I've had the satisfaction in recent years of more and more doctors telling me, 'I'm with you on Vietnam.'" Currently, he says, his mail from physicians "is about equally divided between those who are scornful and those who are supportive."

As a legal resident of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, Dr. Spock will be unable to vote for himself or anyone else, since islanders cannot vote in national elections. Were he a legal resident of New York, where he practiced for many years and has a home, he says, he would write in his own name, since he is not on the ballot in that state. Of the two major party candidates for President, he leaves no doubt about his preference for Senator McGovern as "the lesser evil." But he also leaves no doubt that his views and those of his party are far to the left of the Democratic candidate's.

"We don't believe McGovern's program would anywhere near solve the basic problems of the country," he says. "Even if he fights like a lion for his program, Congress won't give him most of it. The most urgent task is to

begin building an independent political movement, and we can't postpone it another four years to assure the election of the lesser evil. That's the job of the Democratic Party."

Even though he concedes his vote will be small, Dr. Spock considers himself a serious candidate. The federal government evidently regards his candidacy as serious enough to provide round-the-clock Secret Service agents to guard him. "They're very nice," he says. "They drive me places, and that's convenient, but they won't let me get out of the car to buy a paper."

At 6 ft 4 in. and weighing 190 lb, the world's most famous baby doctor is at 69 a man of impressive vigor and élan. Sitting on a sofa in shirt sleeves

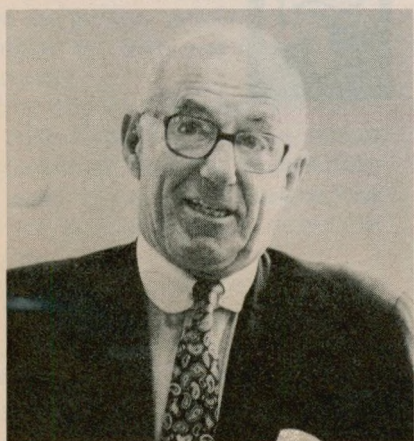
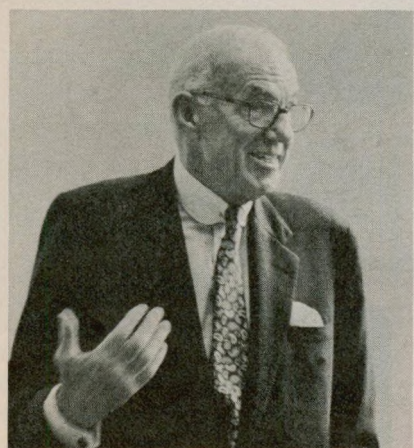
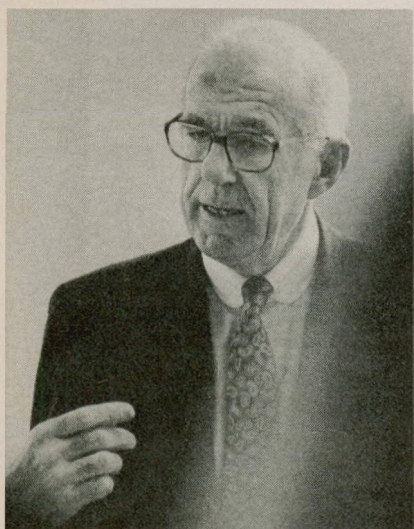
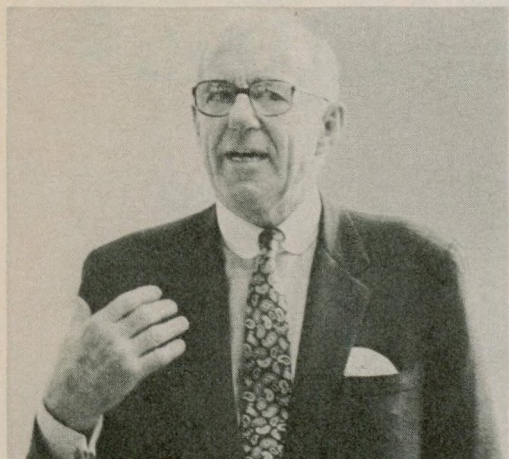
and suspenders in his comfortable apartment in New York City's east 80s, he talks with warmth and engaging candor of how he has changed in recent years, of what the country's young people have taught him, of his campaign, his program, his hopes, while his wife Jane, on another sofa, adds an occasional footnote.

Is there a connection between Dr. Spock's early work as pediatrician and counselor on child care and his later political activism? He thinks there is, adding a rhetorical question of his own: "What's the good of bringing up healthy, adjusted children if they're going to be incinerated in war or disillusioned in an unjust society?"

"The changes in myself came step

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by step," he continues. "I was pushed and pulled, first being pulled into Sane [National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy] in 1962, not because I was a dove but because I was reluctantly persuaded that if we didn't have a test-ban treaty, more children would die of cancer or leukemia or be born with birth defects. I saw it as a pediatric issue. Then I was pulled into President Johnson's campaign for re-election." Viewing himself with a critical eye, he adds: "Of course, it's easier for me to abide by my convictions living on royalties from books than if I had to make my living from patients in the community and depend on the goodwill of my peers."

The author of *Baby and Child Care* traces the roots of his radicalism to the time in 1927 when he transferred from Yale medical school, where he had spent two years, to Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. The oldest of six children, the pediatrician—whose full name is Benjamin McLane Spock—was the son of Benjamin Ives Spock, for many years general counsel of the New Haven Railroad. The family was staunchly Republican, and the younger Benjamin cast his first vote for Coolidge. He switched from Yale to P&S because he no longer wanted to live with his family in New Haven and wished to marry, which he did that year. "It was after I transferred that I first became aware there were Democrats and Socialists," he recalls, "and became interested in national and international affairs. I shocked my family when I voted for Al Smith in 1928."

Dr. Spock took postgraduate training in both pediatrics and psychiatry. From 1933 to 1947, except for two war years in the Naval Reserve—where he served as a psychiatrist—he practiced pediatrics in New York City. Then followed years of teaching and research at the Mayo Clinic, the Rochester (Minn.) Child Health Institute, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Pittsburgh, culminating with 12 happy years at Western Reserve University, after which he retired in 1967.

The pediatrician was a New Deal Democrat throughout the Roosevelt

and Truman years. Before the end of that period he had won national and international acclaim for his child-care text, published in 1946. The book has become one of the best sellers of all time. Sales in this country have reached about 26 million—surpassed only by the Bible and Shakespeare—and the book has been translated into many other languages. Dr. Spock observes that sales declined appreciably after he publicly opposed the Vietnam war, but they are going up again now.

He rejects the charge that the book has encouraged permissive rearing of children and that unorthodox behavior among America's youth can be laid at his doorstep. "*Baby and Child Care* isn't the least bit permissive, and most American parents can distinguish between my child-rearing advice and my politics." At the same time, he affirms his strong ties with radical young people. "It was they who radicalized me rather than the other way around. Because they weren't committed to a society with so many injustices, they were able to take a stand quickly." He admits, though, at first he was "put off by the way the young people dressed."

Just how wide the sartorial generation gap must have been can be surmised—Dr. Spock dresses conservatively with an old-fashioned elegance. He favors dark-hued suits and narrow ties, he says, a wry look in his eyes behind his horn-rimmed glasses. But neither dress nor age has stood in the way of rapport with radical youth. "It was they who welcomed me with open arms when I was indicted and convicted."

He was referring to his indictment with four others in January 1968, six months after he had signed and helped distribute a document, "A Call To Resist Illegitimate Authority," which offered moral and legal support to young men who resisted the draft for reasons of conscience. He and three of his co-defendants were convicted of conspiracy to abet resistance to the draft, a verdict later reversed on a technicality by the U.S. Court of Appeals. The government then dropped the case.

For Dr. Spock the indictment and trial were a crucible in which much of

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CANDIDATE SPOCK *continued*

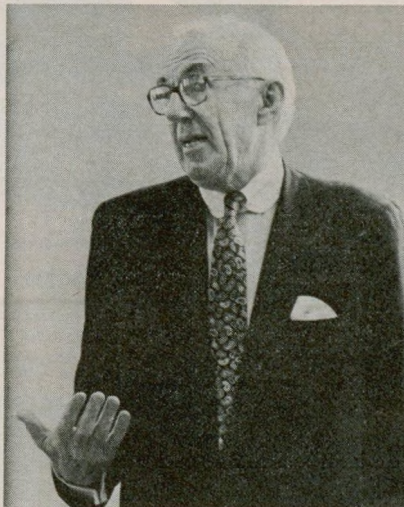
his present radical philosophy was shaped. "They tried to throw me into jail for telling the truth to the American people, and this made me look at the U.S. government in a critical way as I'd never done before. It made me realize that Vietnam was only one brazen example of the things our government has been doing for over 100 years, starting with the war against Mexico in which we took 40% of its territory. And I was also able to see with a critical eye our failures in domestic policy, with 30 million Americans living below the official poverty line because government is beholden first to industry."

Dr. Spock notes that in earlier years, when asked about the distribution of medical care, "I used to hem and haw and profess lack of knowledge. Now I recognize this was an evasion. The figures on morbidity and mortality show that the U.S. could easily have the best medical care in the world but actually has mediocre care for the majority of citizens." His own platform calls for "good-quality free medical care for all people."

Perhaps even more crucial in the evolution of Dr. Spock's political activism was President Johnson's decision to bomb North Vietnam. "In 1964," he recalls, "I was asked to campaign for Johnson's re-election. I did a lot of speaking on the radio and TV because he had promised not to escalate the war in Vietnam. After the election, the President called and thanked me: 'Dr. Spock, I hope I prove worthy of your trust.' I replied: 'Mr. President, I know you will.'"

Dr. Spock calls the bombing that began in February 1965 and the buildup of American ground forces "a betrayal of all of us who voted for Johnson. This changed my whole life and even my personality. I quadrupled my antiwar activities after that," which led to his leadership of peace demonstrations, to acts of non-violent civil disobedience and brief trips to jail, and to his current candidacy on a platform whose first plank proposes "immediate withdrawal of all American forces from Southeast Asia and from our 3,000 bases around the world."

The platform would also set a \$50,000-a-year ceiling on income, and



urges legalization of marijuana and abortion. Dr. Spock and his party have a dim view of the American economic system and seek fundamental change. "But we differ from other radical parties," he explains, "in not talking about setting up a new huge bureaucracy in Washington to run everything. We say industry must be broken down into local components, each component being run by boards of workers and consumers."

Dr. Spock speaks a bit wistfully about the plans he had when he retired five years ago. He thought he would devote every other month to working for peace and spend alternate summer months sailing a boat—"my greatest pleasure." It hasn't worked out that way, and most of the year is spent working for peace and writing. His most recent books, *Decent and Indecent: Our Personal and Political Behavior* and *A Teenager's Guide to Life and Love*, were both published in 1970, and he does a monthly article for *Redbook*.

Some of his writing has drawn fire from the women's liberation movement because of its ideas on women's roles. "The women's liberation movement educated me," he says with a smile. "It was rather painful, since they scathingly denounced me. But they did convince me that I was to a mild degree sexist, though I didn't change enough to satisfy the militants." As a result of this criticism, he has revised parts of his last two books and is now engaged in making minor changes in *Baby and Child Care* "to eliminate traces of sexism."

Dr. Spock is unique among Presidential candidates in paying his own expenses. He is also one of the heaviest contributors to the People's Party, the budget of which is only about \$30,000 this year. The party was formed at three conferences last year that brought together delegates from various local and state radical parties. The Vice Presidential candidate is Julius Hobson, a black educator who is director of the Washington Institute for Quality Education.

Although he is nearing 70, Dr. Spock takes the rigors of campaigning in his stride, speaking at six to eight meetings a day. "I have inexhaustible energy," he says. ■