

argument for an interlocked, synergistic ruling class also seems passé after a shake-out period in which major corporations such as Gulf, Koppers, Mesta, and National Steel have failed, reorganized, or left town. The example of a local lion-king that Hathaway cites is Robert Buckley, head of defunct Allegheny International who is hounded now by a bankruptcy court.

Hathaway also attributes the relative passivity of workers to his view that they feel powerless in the face of control by the local economic elite. To some extent, this may be true. We live in a trickle-down time. But average people repeatedly have shown that when they want something, they often can mobilize to get it, whether it's more prison cells, less toxic waste next door, or an employee buy-out such as the one at Weirton Steel, in Weirton, W. Va.

Corporate politics in particular has become more complex and interesting than the nineteenth century theory of class conflict would allow. The modern industrial or post-industrial company has four constituencies: employees, managers, owners (shareholders), and consumers. Each, of course, has different interests, and each can expand its influence by joining or melding with another. At Weirton Steel, for example, workers saved their jobs and the West Virginia Panhandle by becoming shareholders. At the LTV electro-galvanizing plant in Cleveland, some workers increased their stature by in effect becoming their own managers.

Dale Hathaway engages important issues in a part of modern regional history that otherwise might be lost. But his analysis of workers' weaknesses in the labor market is clouded by an ideology that is not particularly useful in a profoundly changed world. ❁

Just Good Politics: The Life of Raymond Chafin, Appalachian Boss

Raymond Chafin and Topper Sherwood

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994. Pp. xv, 197. \$24.95

by John Hennen

Logan County, W. Va., Democratic political boss Raymond Chafin and Charleston journalist Topper Sherwood have joined forces to create a lively and illuminating political memoir. Chafin's career embodies the personalist, ritualistic power brokering (vote buying, road building, school building) inherent in the bumptious waltzes of West Virginia politics, spanning a half-century from the early Depression era to the 1980s. Sherwood has intelligently edited Chafin's observations so as to imply the erosion of traditional community practices during Chafin's lifetime, and to bring into view the universality of Chafin's traditional style of personal politics, as practiced by such influential West Virginia political figures as M. M. Neely, William Marland, Robert C. Byrd, and Arch Moore.

The book is actually a series of anecdotes woven together in a rough chronology, and is promoted on the book jacket as the inside story on John F. Kennedy's celebrated victory in the 1960

West Virginia Democratic presidential primary. Historical and market imperatives demand an emphasis on Kennedy's West Virginia struggle, and Chafin's role as a mountain Metternich in that campaign is important to the narrative, but hopefully readers will not focus on that episode to the exclusion of others. In a sense, if the Kennedy mystique overshadows Chafin's primarily locally grounded memoir, it would serve as a metaphor for the historical periphery that the state occupies relative to national political and economic demands, a status which has institutionalized an assumption that regions are of value only in relation to national events, needs, and "values."

That would be unfortunate, because Chafin and Sherwood often return to the currents of West Virginia life and politics in the context of the loss of local and regional autonomy that modern market (inter)nationalism demands. Many of this memoir's most enriching moments are interdependent with Chafin's responses to the bureaucratic modernization of life, labor, and the mechanics of governance. Partly as a testament to judicious editing, and partly attributable to Chafin's gift as storyteller, these moments flow effortlessly from the topic at hand into the broader picture of Chafin's life in tradition-bound "good politics." Chafin provides glimpses of traditional life in observations about home, diet, cooperative land use, and the prevalence of chestnut "mast" to nourish free-ranging cattle and hogs. He integrates his memories of work on county road crews — the preindustrial duty of able-bodied males — with industrial mining conditions and the reign of Logan County's most celebrated and notorious public figure of the prohibition and "mine war" era, Sheriff Don Chafin. (A distant relative to the book's subject. "If it's a Curry or a Chafin," Raymond says, "you can pretty much figure that I'm related to it somehow." [17]) He notes the importance of moonshining to his community's underground economy, and outlines the politics of the illicit liquor trade. He matter-of-factly recounts the structure of rewards for political loyalties, dissecting the autocratic power to control elections and patronage exercised by his political mentors, and, later, by Chafin himself. He updates some of West Virginia's most enduring legends to salt his reminiscences, including the pervasive account of the (political or union) agitator thrown into the powerhouse furnace (67), and the Logan County jailhouse murder of the "outside" union organizer, usually reported in the context of the coal strike and mine war of 1920-1921.

False humility is not one of Chafin's faults, and he often exaggerates the reach of his political mastery. He suggests that in 1953, Governor William Marland ordered a road built in Chafin's home community of Cow Creek because Raymond fed him some of Aunt Mary Browning's famous hamburgers. (Mary was the mother of Chauncey Browning, a Chafin ally who once served as West Virginia's attorney general.) President Kennedy in 1961, appreciative of Chafin's delivery of Logan County in the 1960 primary, adopts Chafin's analysis of institutional hunger and, *presto!*, initiates the food stamp program. Governor Jay Rockefeller builds bridges at Chafin's command. Logan County Democratic Chairman and elder statesman Raymond Chafin, powerbroker nonpareil, ignites the gubernatorial campaign of darkhorse insurance mogul Gaston Caperton, setting in motion the events

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that sweep Caperton to the governor's office in 1988, toppling crafty incumbent Arch Moore. Just as with any enduring mythology, these and other entertaining tales contain elements of truth, but they occasionally obscure and de-contextualize the intricacies of true political genius that emerge from the whole of Chafin's primer on the anatomy of power.

The structural relationships of Chafin's community-based politics, as both narrator and editor of *Just Good Politics* recognize, are endangered and probably doomed. Only a superficial perversion of traditional personalistic forms of politics, such as the expensive and manipulative electronic "town meeting," mark the atomistic age of artificial intelligence and (dis)information. Chafin offers no apology for the reciprocal, locally bound corruption of traditional politics. On the contrary, he argues for the relatively egalitarian bonds of the old forms. Information Age politics rests not on the petty bribery of poll watchers (the "Lever Brothers" is Chafin's term), but on the migratory hucksterism of marketing hired guns, whose venomous advertising models are available only to concentrated wealth, making exclusionary and narrow exercises of electoral politics. The accountability of face-to-face politics is eroded, Chafin concludes, and gone are the days when candidates "found you in your cornfield and told you what they stood for." (189) Chafin also does a service to his state and neighbors by assessing corporate West Virginia politics with the industrialist's query, "Which man is going to let me dump the most in the creek? Who'll let me get by this law or that one . . . Who's going to let me strip coal and scrape the trees over the hillside the way I want?"

Topper Sherwood's sensitive and generally adroit treatment

of Chafin's oral memoir is praiseworthy. Sherwood rarely injects himself into the narrative, and then only in the form of brief footnotes. In fact, I believe Sherwood is too unobtrusive by half. A seasoned journalist with a keen understanding of the state's political economy, Sherwood would have served this work well with a more lengthy contextual introduction, after the fashion of Nell Painter's lead to *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (Harvard, 1979) or Theodore Rosengarten's classic introduction to *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* [Ned Cobb] (Knopf, 1975). Readers unfamiliar with West Virginia's history would be helped by more substantive comments on such topics as the 1920-1921 mine struggle, state Democratic factionalism in Chafin's formative New Deal years, the Neely and Marland political machines, and the Hatfield-McCoy feud. The note on that complex manifestation of industrial transformation in the Tug Fork Valley artificially extends episodic events of 1878-1890 to 1860-1900 (the subtitle of Altina Waller's 1988 social history of the feud uses these dates, but Waller is addressing much broader processes than the feud itself). In another rather careless oversight, Chafin's contemporary in Chicago, political boss Richard Daley, is identified as Dan Daley (132).

These are important but minor flaws, which could easily be addressed when *Just Good Politics* enjoys a well-deserved new edition in a few years. Chafin and Sherwood have crafted a substantive, entertaining, and insightful memoir of the complex relationships between kinship, community, and political life in a rural industrial state. 🌀