American Political Legacy Is Pluralism, Limited Govt.

By EDDIE PRICE

Dr. Hans J. Morgenthau of the University of Chicago spoke to a Hamman Hall audience Monday night on the need to reformulate the principles of the American polity—to abstract the perennial political truths from our traditions and to apply those truths to the problems of today.

DR. MORGENTHAU'S lecture, concluding the series on the American Political Tradition, was on "The American Political Legacy." He began by asking whether a distinct American legacy actually exists, and answered those who have charged that it doesn't by affirming the unique quality of the American experiment, to which many other nations have looked as a model for their own governments.

Two distinct traditions set the American legacy apart from that of any other governmental system: the concept of a government limited by the people, and the pluralism of many different interests and philosophies competing in the "marketplace of political ideas."

SEEMING almost diminutive next to the towering Dr. Nelson, Dr. Morgenthau spoke with a fluency and cogency that were not marred by his unmistakable German accent.

Moving from the domestic legacies of the American political tradition to the history of our foreign policy, Dr. Morgenthau recalled the geographical accident of physical isolation from hostile powers that enabled the United States to pursue a more or less abstentionist foreign policy until the First World War and throughout the '20s and '30s.

BUT SINCE the Second World War, America has realized that revolutions in communication and transportation have rendered isolation obsolete. Our generation today is face to face with the tremendous task of reformulating American foreign policy, while preserving our traditional principles of equality in freedom.

Another paradox of the present era is the misunderstanding of the menacing of democracy. The Anglo-American concept has always been one of restrained government—of leadership responsive to a higher law. But step by step we are accepting the French Jacobin ideal of majority rule.

THIS ATTITUDE is reflected in our government's reliance on public opinion polls in making policy decisions. The trouble with this is that public opinion does not spring up from the man on the street—it is created, either by the President or by his opponents. This means that the president either leads absolutely or is completely stymied.

At the end of the lecture, Dr. Nelson announced plans for a new series of lectures on the European Political Tradition, to be held next spring. The quality of this year's series indicates that the new series should be one of the highlights of the Semi-Centennial Celebration.