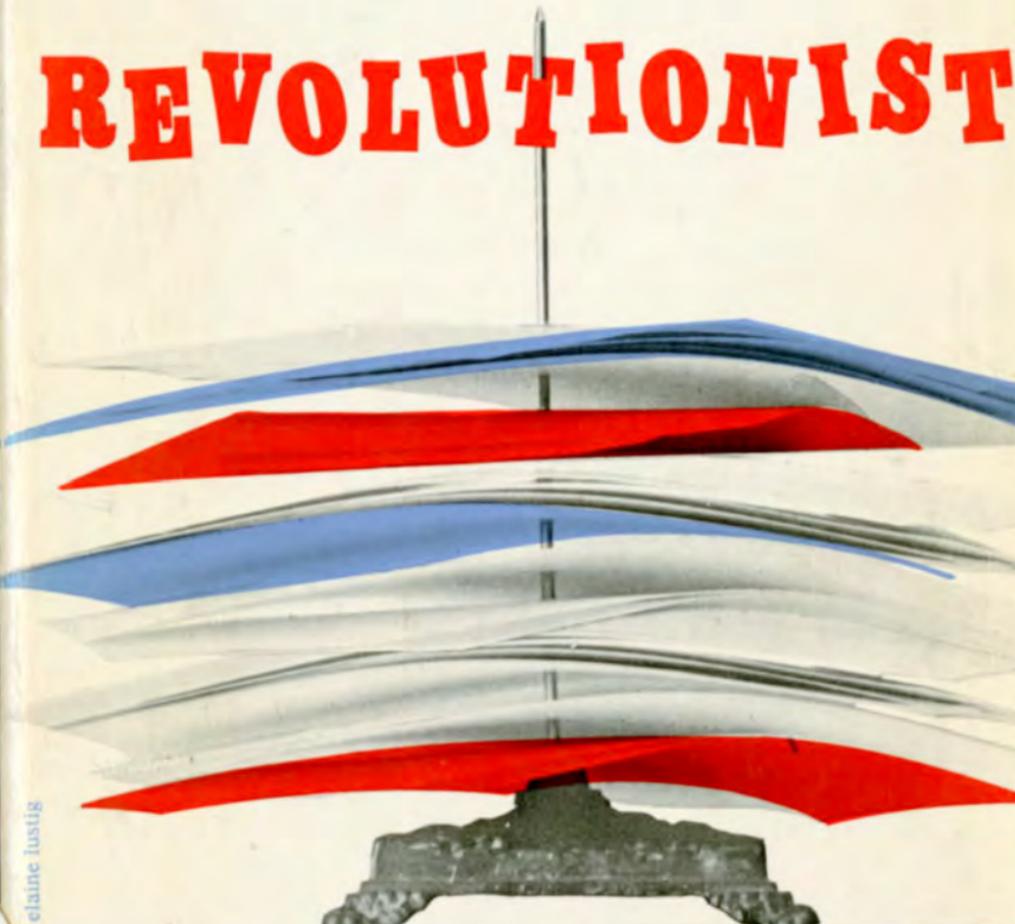


Essays in Political Criticism

# MEMOIRS OF A REVOLUTIONIST

elaine iustig



**DWIGHT MACDONALD**

MERIDIAN BOOKS M 56

\$1.45 Canada \$1.60



# CONTENTS

---

Articles whose source is not identified at the end of the piece appeared first in the magazine *Politics*.

<i>Introduction: POLITICS PAST</i>	3
<b>THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PEOPLES</b>	
The Responsibility of Peoples	33
Massacre from the Air	72
The Germans—Three Years Later	75
Notes on the Psychology of Killing	79
My Favorite General	92
The Responsibility of Intellectuals	100
Two Footnotes to History	104
<b>LOOKING AT THE WAR</b>	
The Unconscious War	107
C.P.U.S.A. Liquidates Itself	113
Roosevelt's Labor Draft	115
Internationale into Nationale	116
Monte Cassino	118

"Native Politics"	119
Three Worlds	121
Mr. Churchill's Spades	124
The Prospects for Revolution	129
Warsaw	138
'Twas a Famous Victory	148
1919 v. 1944	153
Old Judge Hull & the Refugees	154
Horrors—Ours and Theirs	159
A Japanese Badoglio?	162
The Bomb	169
The Late War: A Trial Balance	181
Stalin's February Ninth Speech	183
Truman's Doctrine, Abroad and at Home	186
The Pacifist Dilemma	193
"I Choose the West"	197

## THE CULTURAL FRONT

Kulturbolshewismus & Mr. Van Wyck Brooks	203
Homage to Twelve Judges	215
Bureaucratic Culture: Nicholas I and Josef I	218
The Eisenstein Tragedy	229
Alien Corn	241
Liberal Soap Opera	246
Memo to Mr. Luce	254
A Way of Death	262

## POLITICAL PATHOLOGY

*Ultra-Left*

On the Proletariat as a Revolutionary Class	267
Trotskyism I: "The Only Really Moral People"	272
Trotskyism II: Revolution, Ltd.	275
A Historic Moment	283

*The Liberals*

The Death of F.D.R.	285
"People's Capitalism"	287
Curiouser and Curiouser	290

What Is Totalitarian Liberalism?	292
The Truth about the U.N.	296
A Note on Wallese	298

*The Comrades*

Remarks on the Constitution of the Mongol People's Republic	302
USA v. USSR	307
The Great Thaw	314

*Far Into the Right*

The Neo-Non-Conservatism, or Notes on a Career	319
--	-----

## SAINTS

Gandhi	345
Dorothy Day	349

## BY THE WAY

The Question of God	369
Too Big	373

literary interests he pursued in the unpolitical twenties. This parabola seems to me now quite natural, if only because I have described a similar arc myself, and I now think no one has a duty to interest himself in politics except a politician. Even in the thirties, we on *Partisan Review* defended the autonomy of art and opposed the Stalinist efforts to politicize literature (also the Trotskyist efforts to integrate P.R. into their movement—we had a long, solemn, and, as of 1957, slightly comic debate by mail with Trotsky in Mexico on the subject). But this came from our head, and perhaps also from an instinct of self-preservation; in our hearts we felt, as did the Auden-Spender-Strachey-Orwell London of the thirties, that political interest, nay commitment, was an essential part of the equipment of The Compleat Thinker.

Things have changed. We are less interested today in radical politics—that is, parties, programs, ideologies that assume a radical (in the sense of going to the roots) reconstruction of the old order. Indeed, one might almost say we aren't interested at all, and that this kind of politics no longer attracts intellectuals (who, since the time of Babeuf and Saint-Just, have normally been the most energetic propounders of radical ideas as well as the most faithful audience for them). The apathy and, not to put too fine a point on it, ignorance of the present younger generation about these matters is striking, and a little depressing, to one who like myself was young in the thirties.

## 1.

The difference then and now in the New York intellectual atmosphere—in this context, New York is America, as Paris is France—is that then we believed in revolution<sup>x</sup> and now we don't.\* 1930–45 was filled with dramatic and terrible

\* Though I remember once walking in the street and suddenly really *seeing* the big heavy buildings in their obstinate actuality and realizing I simply couldn't imagine all this recalcitrant matter transformed by socialism. How would the street *look* when the workers took it over, how would, how could revolution transfigure the miles

x) because of events abroad: except for the depression -

events: the depression, the rise of Nazism, the Spanish Civil War, the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the war itself, Hitler's extermination of six million Jews, Stalin's murderous forced-labor camps, Truman's atomic bombings. These events aroused our sympathy and indignation, and we felt we ought to respond politically. And they were of such a drastic, unheard-of nature that we thought only an equally drastic solution would do.

In America, where even the most optimistic of us couldn't see revolution around the corner, or around several corners, the coming war was our trump card. We expected, or at least hoped, it would create "revolutionary situations" abroad as the First World War had, and that from these socialist influences might cross the Atlantic. ("Socialism in one country" was as historically inconceivable in advanced America as in backward Russia.) The situations did occur, but they never got beyond the embryonic stage; there was nothing like the 1917 Russian revolution, nothing like even the timid 1918 German revolution. Moscow was, of course, as frightened of revolutions as the West, and between them the two great imperial powers, USA and USSR, were able to control the postwar world. The "Third Camp" of the oppressed masses never got beyond the stage of a slogan and today is not even that. Therefore, most of us have made a "lesser evil" choice—the pages and pages of argumentation I have written exposing the illogic and immorality of this position! And since the imperfect democracy of the West is clearly a lesser evil than the perfected tyranny of the Communists, we have chosen the West.

While necessary, this choice is not very stimulating. (The and miles of stubborn stone? I couldn't conceive of a flame hot enough to melt into new forms this vast solid Is.

A few years later, the bombing fleets did melt great sections of the world's cities and the political structure of many nations was also pulverized. But there was no energy to build Utopia on the ruins. Either the rickety old building was patched up, with a tarpaulin slung overhead to keep out the rain, as in France, or else the Communists imposed a new order much worse than the old. Such a mountain of destruction, such a political mouse!

prodigal son must have found home life, once the fatted calf was eaten, as boring as ever.) So intellectuals are less interested in politics than they were, feeling that their special qualities of idealism and rationality, useful in times of radical change, are not much needed merely to keep things going. We have also become leery of revolution even if it were possible. If tradition, privilege, custom, and legality restrict, they also preserve, and after the Russian experience, it is hard to respond with the old enthusiasm to Bakunin's "Creative Destruction" or Marx's "Change the World!" One inclines to endure familiar evils rather than risk unknown and possibly greater ones. Even private property, detested by every right-thinking, that is left-thinking, intellectual in the thirties—the ordinary people had a more sensible view on this as on other matters—even this *bête-noire* of Marxism now presents a democratic aspect. A citizen with property has that much firmer a base of resistance to the encroachments of the State, as Jefferson and Madison knew, or Stalin when he forced the peasants into collective farms. Of course, Burke, Tocqueville, and other conservative thinkers have been telling us this for two hundred years, but nobody listened. The revival of a true, principled conservatism—not the bully-boy adventurism of McCarthy or the Suez Group—would be of the greatest value today. It is a task that would employ the special talents of intellectuals, and if it wouldn't give them the kick that revolutionism did, the hangover wouldn't be as bad either.

## 2.

I came late to the revolutionary movement (or what we then took to be such) partly because I went to Yale instead of, for example, "City College" (the College of the City of New York). Many of my Trotskyist comrades had begun handing out antiwar leaflets and marching in May Day parades while they were in short pants, and by the time they had started to shave were able to distinguish between social-revolution, social-democracy and social-fascism. At thirty, when I first read Marx, they were scarred veterans

far more seriously than I was able to.\* After six months I was graduated from the Training Squad and offered a job at the necktie counter, salary \$30 a week. I resigned and after a depressing hiatus of a month or two, for I had no income, I got a writing job, through a Yale classmate, on Henry Luce's embryonic *Fortune*.

The first issue of *Fortune*, a lushly illustrated dollar-a-copy monthly dreamed up by Luce to celebrate the "saga" of American business, appeared shortly after the stock-market collapse in the fall of 1929 that inaugurated the Great Depression. Many entrepreneurs would have given up, but Luce had the Stalingrad spirit and persisted—the magazine still appears, in a more sober and sophisticated mode—and I with him. There was a difference, however, in our evolution. I became increasingly skeptical about American capitalism, which I saw at close quarters. My undergraduate suspicions were confirmed—the men running our capitalist system were narrow, uncultivated and commonplace; they had a knack for business as unrelated to other qualities as a talent for chess, and they could have been replaced as our ruling class without any damage to our culture by an equal number of citizens picked at random from the phone book; their social and economic theories, or rather prejudices, were childish; their Republican Party was as unable to cope with the depression as they were. The New Deal was inspiriting to me, as to my fellow writers on *Fortune*. To Luce's dismay, we became increasingly liberal; we wanted to write about Roosevelt's farm program, about the NRA (National Recovery Administration), the CIO, the Wagner Act, unemployment, social security, anything but business. Luce was divided between his pro-business convictions and his journalistic instinct, which told him the CIO was news and that the wonders of American Cyanamid Co. weren't; his typically American pragmatic fascination with Power and Success told him the same

---

\* Cf. the dream every American little-magazine writer has had, at some time, of financing his serious work by writing pot-boilers. I have never heard of this working out. It seems one must be whole-hearted even to be a successful hack.

my belated interest in politics now grew so rapidly as to make economic history seem academic. Toward the end of my time on *Fortune*, I had begun to read Marx, Lenin and Trotsky (at last!). As much of a pragmatist as the next American—fellow by the name of Luce—I leaned toward the Communists because they alone, on the American Left seemed to be “doing something.” I became a mild fellow traveler, giving pay-parties for Class-War Martyrs like Angelo Herndon, attending Stalinist-sponsored meetings to help Southern sharecroppers, support the Theatre Union, free Tom Mooney, etc., and accepting as a matter of course their guidance in founding the *Time-Fortune* unit of the Newspaper Guild. Then, in the late winter of 1937, I read *The Case of the Anti-Soviet Center*, a thick volume printed in Moscow and sold for a pittance in the Party’s bookstores, which gave the verbatim transcript of the second Moscow Trial. It was fascinating reading, and, I must admit, persuaded me, for a time, that *some* kind of conspiracy was going on; later I began to notice contradictions, lack of motivation, and absence of supporting evidence. But even a first reading, with a pro-Soviet bias, convinced me of the absurdity of the trial’s main political thesis: that Trotsky had conspired with representatives of Hitler, Mussolini, the Mikado and most of the surviving Bolshevik leaders to kill Stalin and restore capitalism in Russia.\* A lead review of the book by Malcolm Cowley in *The New Republic* took the hypocritical line both American liberal weeklies (*The Nation* was the other) followed on the Trials—“suspending judgment until more conclusive evidence is produced” while actually endorsing the essentials of the prosecution’s case and smearing Trotsky and the de-

\* “For nothing at all, just for the sake of Trotsky’s beautiful eyes,” testifies Radek (p. 543) apropos an alleged letter from Trotsky “which, unfortunately, I burned” as he, unfortunately, burned all the others, “the country was to return to capitalism. When I read this, I felt as if I were in a madhouse.” I agreed, but wondered if the head keeper’s name was Trotsky or Stalin. It shows, by the way, how far the Stalinists had already lost contact with reality that they took such pains to circulate a document that could only arouse grave doubts in most non-Party readers.

fendants. This stimulated me to write a five-page letter-to-the-editor, of which, after considerable haggling, they printed a third. Instantly I received an invitation, and accepted it, to join the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, headed by John Dewey, which had been formed to find a refuge for Trotsky, to look into the charges against him, and to give him a hearing. The “Trotsky Committee” attracted an extraordinary roster of intellectuals—the Stalinist cultural front was never the same again—and achieved its aims; Trotsky was admitted to Mexico, the Trials were thoroughly investigated and he testified at length before a commission headed by Dr. Dewey.

That spring (1937) I made my *début* as a liberal journalist with a three-part, now-it-can-be-told serial on the Luce magazines in *The Nation*. Extrapolating the rightward trend of *Time* (it admired Franco and Mussolini and contemned Blum, the CIO and the New Deal) and of Luce himself, I talked about “protofascism” and predicted that, as the class war hotted up, the Luce papers would drop the “proto.” I was wrong—extrapolation is a dangerous toy for a Marxist, like giving a Sten gun to a baby. The class war cooled down as the CIO solidified itself in the mass industries and Roosevelt, with his 1938 “Quarantine the Aggressor” speech in Chicago, began to develop an interventionist foreign policy that at last brought back prosperity and also pleased a large section of the Right. Henry Luce soon kicked upstairs the pro-Franco foreign news editor and reoriented his magazines in a more liberal direction. Similarly, U.S. Steel, within a year after my articles appeared, had peacefully signed a contract with the CIO, and was gently modernizing itself. The credit for these improvements should probably go to the *zeitgeist*, and the coming war, rather than to the power of my pen.

My *début* on *The Nation* was also a farewell tour, for I soon became politically *non grata* with the liberal weeklies. The speed with which I evolved from a liberal into a radical and from a tepid Communist sympathizer into an ardent anti-Stalinist still amazes me. It was much the quickest of

Trotskyist leaders, whom I had known since I had written for *The Symposium*, an ultra-highbrow quarterly he and Philip Wheelwright had put out for a time around 1932. (About then, I had also been an editor—with Dupee and Morris—of a similar, though less elegant, venture, *The Miscellany*; it was an era of “little” magazines; typically, neither *Symposium* nor *Miscellany* showed much interest in politics.) Not that I needed urging. The Trotskyist movement was at that period attractive to people like me because it was the most revolutionary of the sizable left-wing groups (by “sizable” I mean over 200), because of the moral shock of the Moscow Trials, because of its high level and above all because it was led by Trotsky, whose career showed that intellectuals, too, could make history.

In the late thirties the *avant-garde* political spectrum looked like this, reading from right to left: *Communists* (who had moved overnight, on orders from Moscow, from the far left to the extreme right, becoming “critical supporters” of the New Deal and later not-at-all-critical supporters of the war), *Social Democrats* (a small but well-heeled group of aging right-wing Socialists centering around the Rand School and the weekly *New Leader*), *Socialists* (led by Eugene Debs in World War One and now by Norman Thomas), “*Love-stoneites*” (called after their leader, Jay Lovestone, whom Stalin had deposed from the leadership of the American Communist Party in 1929 because Lovestone was an adherent of Bukharin; all groups to the left of the Lovestoneites sneered at them as “centrists,” a fighting word, because they tried to steer a middle course between reform and revolution), *Socialist Workers Party* (Trotskyites, led by James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman, former Communists who had founded the party when Trotsky was exiled by Stalin in 1929 and who still lead it—or rather each leads one of the halves into which it split in 1940), *Socialist Labor Party* (followers—or, as we called them, “epigones,” another fighting word—of Daniel De Leon, a turn-of-the-century theoretician whom Lenin had called the only American to have made a contribution to Marxian theory, an accolade about equal to a K.C.B.; the De Leonites were

machine guns did in the Russian. The mimeographs were the instruments of production, which, as any Marxist schoolboy knows, are the base of power of every ruling class, and many a faction-fight was decided by who seized control of them first.

The splinter groups looked on us Trotskyists as we looked on the Communists, as opportunists who had sacrificed principle for popularity. Nor could it be denied that, compared to theirs, our party membership was vulgarly large. We had about 800 members.

## 5.

From the fall of 1939 to the spring of 1941 I was a member of the Trotskyist party. My decision to join was, perhaps typically, moral rather than intellectual. I remember reading Marx and Engels intensively in the summer of 1939 in an effort to find out whether I was a Marxist or not. I could never really make up my mind: the critical side attracted me, and also the protest against capitalist injustice, but the dogmatism and the insistence on explaining everything by one system of thought repelled me (as did a certain moral callousness). When the war began, however, I felt I should stand with the party. James P. Cannon tried to convince me I was more valuable, and would be happier, as a sympathizer than as a member; perhaps he felt a fatherly concern at my political innocence; perhaps he suspected I would be a troublesome recruit; perhaps both. And in fact I was always a "new boy" in the party, looked on by my comrades as a bit of a political dilettante; they centered their lives in "the movement," finding their friends and even their wives or husbands within it, but my friends and work (*P.R.*) were mostly outside; nor were they reassured by my criticisms of the dogmatic and undemocratic elements in Leninism.

A few months after I joined the party the Red Army invaded Finland and a faction-fight broke out which by the spring had broken up the party into two parties. (Like divorce in a family, a "split" in a Marxist party was dreaded even by those who longed for it, and each side tried to maneuver the other into taking the guilt.) On one side was Cannon, backed

(alas) by Trotsky, insisting we must support the Russians because theirs was a "workers' state" ("degenerated") and therefore the Red Army was bringing socialism (degenerated) to the Finns. The minority faction, to which I enthusiastically adhered, was led by Shachtman and Burnham; we held that the invasion was imperialist aggression and therefore opposed it. "Support" and "oppose" had no practical meaning, of course; the Cannonites didn't volunteer for the Red Army (which would have shot them); nor did any Shachtmanites go to Finland to fight under Baron Mannerheim. The controversy expressed itself not in action or even in proposals for action but in interminable and (to me) exciting party meetings and tall stacks of mimeographed articles in the "Internal Bulletin" that was circulated only among party members.

I found the struggle educational—I learned a good deal about Marxist theory, the Soviet Union, methods of argument, and party organization—but frustrating. I couldn't get into the fight. I wrote three long articles for the "Internal Bulletin" but, although I had had no trouble getting printed in *Fortune*, *Harper's*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*—or, for that matter, the *N.I.*—my manuscripts were monotonously rejected. The eight hundred members of the party, steeped in Marxicology, aged in the Bolshevik-Leninist wood, were a highly esoteric audience, while I was a highly exoteric writer. They were professionals, I was an amateur. Finally I managed to break into print, or rather mimeograph, with a modest little piece titled "Shamefaced Defensism." This was an analysis of a current article by Trotsky in *Liberty*: I demonstrated that The Old Man was much tougher on Stalin's Russia (and the Red Army) in the bourgeois press than in the Internal Bulletin, and I gave some disrespectful reasons therefor. The article roused the majority faction to fury, not because of its arguments, which they paid no attention to, but simply because a new boy had talked back to the principal. (Besides the Russian Question, there was another important point of disagreement between the factions—the minority wanted a more democratic party, while the majority thought there was too much democracy running around already.) "These *parvenus*

point of the American Left). I went into the WP, but Burnham, although he had been co-leader of our group right up to the split, didn't.<sup>o</sup> Burnham's sudden evaporation was a special blow to me because he had stood for a more democratic and less orthodox party than Shachtman who, understandably, given his political background, wanted to get the new party back on the Leninist rails rather than press on to fresh triumphs of freethinking. The shock of the German breakthrough in Europe that June created another difficulty. It stimulated me to make a study of Nazi society, especially the post-Schacht economy, which in turn led me to conclude that Nazism was neither socialism nor capitalism but something for which Marxian theory had no place, namely, "bureaucratic collectivism"—Burnham had argued much the same thesis about Russia while he was in the party, which didn't help—and this in turn led me to write a 30,000-word article about my discoveries for the *New Internationalist*. The editors were not enthusiastic; they were, frankly, rather disappointed in the article, which struck them as half-baked, superficial, trivial, boring and badly written. They finally agreed, under prodding, to print 4,000 words. Since everything else I'd submitted since 1938 had been gladly printed—professional journalists don't grow on trees, not on Trotskyist trees—I concluded they might also have some objections to the heterodox nature of my thesis. Several other sore points developed, and finally, on March 22nd, 1941, I wrote an 8,000-word letter to my comrades, beginning, "For some time, as is well known, there has been increasingly sharp

<sup>o</sup> A year or so later he published *The Managerial Revolution*, whose thesis was as dramatic as it was flimsy. Burnham treated Marx as Marx had treated Hegel; he "stood him on his head," replacing the proletariat with the industrial managers as the new ruling class, while at the same time keeping the worst faults of Marx's method: the ethical indifference, even cynicism, the romantic belief in a science of History, the grandiose predictions that didn't work out. The difference, aside from the fact that Marx was a genius, was that it took several generations for it to become clear that the proletariat was not the new ruling class, while Burnham's "managerialism" was forgotten, even by the author, in a few years.

conflict between the undersigned and your representatives, the Political Committee, on questions of both theory and organization"; rehearsing my grievances and generalizing on the stuffy intellectual atmosphere in the party; and ending with some "minimum demands" (to restore me to the board of the N.I. and publish an additional 4,000 words of my Nazi-economics article) followed by a dignified, to say the least, peroration:

If these rectifications are made by the Political Committee, as the result of pressure from the National Committee and from the party membership, I will conclude that it will be possible to have a fruitful discussion of the more general issues raised in Section Two—"Should Party Discipline be Applied to Matters of Theory?" And above all, it will be possible to hope that there is some possibility of arresting the present rapid degeneration of the Workers Party into the kind of undesirable bureaucratic-conservative régime we rejected last year in the Socialist Workers Party.

The rectifications were not made, the degeneration was not arrested and a few weeks later I resigned from the party. The massive "document" just quoted is an impressive performance, demonstrating an energetic logic, a fertility in subtle distinctions and a power to isolate the essentials of a complex situation and present them with forceful clarity that astonishes even so critical a rereader as myself. On the other hand, when one considers the discrepancy between the effort invested and (a) the occasion (very minor) and (b) the chances of success (zero—after all, I was trying to persuade Bolsheviks to tolerate free thought so that I could remain in the party, *their* party), then it seems hard to believe that I was practically middle-aged when I wrote it. The whole business was an excellent example of the "as if" political behavior we went in for in those days; we behaved as if our tiny sects (even the Communists were insignificant in national politics) were making History, as if great issues hinged on what we did, or rather what we said and wrote. And so we devoted enormous energies and even some intellectual ability to "documents" like the above. It was all

rather like engraving the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin. But it was excellent training in political thinking. Marxism, like Latin, is a good discipline for the mind.

## 7.

What strikes me most, looking back, is the contrast between the scope of our thought and the modesty of our actions. The problems we were concerned with were so vast that, until History came to our rescue, we couldn't *do* much about them. We were really engaged not in politics but in metapolitics, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as "theoretical political science," adding "often derog." When it was a matter of discussing the Soviet system (was it a "degenerated workers' state" or a "bureaucratic collectivism"? What was its class structure? Were there, indeed, classes at all or merely social groups?), we handled it masterfully in erudite, closely reasoned articles, in formal debates in cheap meeting-rooms off Third Avenue, in arguments around the cafeteria tables of Fourteenth Street. I have not before or since lived in such an atmosphere of passionate, if somewhat scholastic, intellection. But when we had to act, when the problem was, for example, a Congressional campaign, we—or in this case I—wrote leaflets like a 1941 exhibit that began "FOR A SOCIALIST DEFENSE AGAINST HITLERISM! People of the Bronx! Take the First Step! Elect Shachtman to Congress!" and then gave the Ten Point Platform of the Workers Party, of which point 3 was "Hands off Latin America!" and point 9 "Nationalize All Defense Industries!" Shachtman was not elected. Nor did an earlier Ten Point Platform in an election for mayor prove more successful—point 7 was "Modernize the Subway System!"; point 10: "For a Socialist Society!"

Inept we were, but had we been each of us a compound of Robespierre and Northcliffe, Lenin and Luce, we should still have found it hard going. The discouraging response of the masses to our street meetings, picket lines, leaflets and publications was due to deeper causes than our faulty tech-

nique. The last time in American history that radical ideas have had any mass appeal was just before the First World War, when the Socialists published half a dozen *daily* papers, elected Congressmen and almost defeated Gompers with their candidate for the presidency of the American Federation of Labor, and when that strange and unique contribution of America to anarcho-syndicalism, the "Wobblies" (officially the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW, also called I Won't Work), organized great masses of unskilled workers and led strikes in the New England textile mills, the Minnesota iron mines and the Pennsylvania steel industry that were as much social rebellions as economic conflicts. During and immediately after the war the Government, by the use of quasi-legal force and violence, permanently destroyed the Wobblies and the more militant section of the Socialist Party.

The radical tradition never came back, except among the intelligentsia. Not even at the lowest point of the depression, in 1932-33, were the Communists or the Socialists a serious political force. The CIO in a few years subsided from youthful rebellion into bureaucratic conservatism, a devolution that had taken generations in the German and British labor movements. (It was an ironical illustration of Trotsky's "Law of Combined Development," according to which backward nations don't develop gradually as their more advanced predecessors did, but use the existing high level of technique as the springboard for a "dialectical leap" into modernity.) Between 1935 and 1939 the CIO organized the workers in steel, auto, rubber and other mass industries, but all that happened was that those particular workers greatly improved their position inside capitalism, a Good Thing but hardly revolutionary. We didn't even get a Labor Party out of it.

The failure of socialism to attract the American masses was all the more discouraging because the depression was far worse in the United States than anywhere else except Germany. By the summer of 1932 the "soundest" common stocks were selling at fantastic prices: U.S. Steel was \$22 a share, down from \$262 in September 1929; American Telephone & Telegraph had dropped from \$304 to \$72, General

Motors from \$73 to \$8. By 1933 there were thirteen millions unemployed, a fifth of the working population, and national production was one-third less than it had been in 1929. The usual explanation of the inability of the Left to exploit this breakdown is that the New Deal offered a solution. And so it did, politically; the great reforms of Roosevelt's first six years—Wagner Act, Wages & Hours Law, Social Security, etc.—brought American capitalism instantly (as historical time goes) up to the British level, another illustration of the Law of Combined Development. But the New Dealers were unable to cope with the economic crisis. It took the war to do that. Unemployment stuck at eight million or more up to the end of 1940, except for a brief improvement in 1937, which was quickly erased by the sharp recession that began that autumn and was finally overcome not by New Deal measures but by war orders.

Thus all through the thirties there seemed to us radicals no reason to believe in the "viability" of American capitalism. And yet the masses remained apathetic about socialism. We were right, but they wouldn't listen. Nothing is more frustrating for an intellectual than to work out a logical solution to a problem and then find that nobody is interested.\*

In our isolation and impotence we metropoliticians were kept going by the illusion that we had in our pocket a skeleton key to History. We were the Marxian *illuminati*, whose esoteric knowledge enabled us to divine the real,

\* It's even worse now. In the thirties we foresaw that American capitalism might find a basis for survival in what we called "a permanent war economy," but we saw this in terms of Goering's alternative—"guns or butter"—and we predicted a decline in living standards and a consequent growth of mass discontent. The war economy has come and is relatively "permanent"—that is, one can see no end to it as long as the USA and the USSR are life-or-death rivals—but American capitalism has shown an extraordinary and unexpected capacity to produce; living standards—especially of the low-income groups—are at levels that would have been considered fantastic in the thirties; and, in short, the economy is producing both guns and butter.

hidden nature of events and, when the time came, to Take Advantage of Revolutionary Situations. We were the "cadres of leadership" ("cadre: permanent establishment of a regiment forming nucleus for expansion at need") and the masses would fall in behind us as they had followed the Bolsheviks in October. The smallness of Lenin's pre-1917 party was a great comfort—if he could take over Russia with a mere handful of disciplined comrades, why not . . . ?

Viewed from 1957, much of our behavior appears absurd and even mildly insane ("*metapolitics*: . . . often derog."). But if our actions compared grotesquely to our aspirations, if we were intellectually arrogant and morally more than a little smug, we did believe in a great cause and we did make real sacrifices for it.

## 8.

In the summer of 1943 I resigned from the editorial board of *Partisan Review*, thus graduating, after six years, from the third and last of the educational institutions that have been important in my life—the other two were Phillips Exeter Academy and the Trotskyist movement. After Pearl Harbor Rahv and Phillips had come to feel it was their war and their country, while I had remained disaffected. They wanted to reduce the magazine's political content and concentrate on literary criticism, while I wanted to continue the mixture as before. (Political writing those days meant Left-wing writing; those who supported the war felt no impulse to rush into print; patriotism was still morally suspect and intellectually unfashionable—and besides, they hadn't any conservative vocabulary.) We had some first-class rows, and finally I resigned, writing a sharp letter-to-the-editors which appeared in *P.R.* with an answer in kind.

At once I began to project a magazine of my own which materialized in February 1944 as a monthly called *Politics*. I was the editor, publisher, owner, proofreader, layout man and chief contributor; my then wife, Nancy, was the business manager, as she had been before that of *P.R.* (The business

manager is the Unknown Soldier of the little-magazine world.) *Politics* ran for five years, the first three as a monthly, the last two, when I had become somewhat jaded, as a quarterly. The vintage year was probably 1945; I had got some experience by then and yet was still fresh; coincidentally or not, the deficit was smallest that year, about \$953; other years it ran from \$2,000 to \$6,000. The chief contributors (five or more articles) were Andrea Caffi ("European"), Nicola Chiaromonte, Lewis Coser ("Louis Clair"), Paul Goodman, Peter Gutman ("Peter Meyer"), Victor Serge, Niccola Tucci and George Woodcock. Perhaps significantly, Goodman was the only American; Caffi was Italian-Russian, Coser was German, Gutman was Czech, Tucci and Chiaromonte were Italians, Serge was Belgian-Russian and Woodcock was English.

*Politics* began with a circulation of about 2,000, which went up to something over 5,000, where it stuck fast. Its readers were mostly male (81 per cent), college graduates (90 per cent), urban (66 per cent lived in cities of over 100,000 population), without party ties (52 per cent—of those belonging to a party the Socialists, with 24 per cent of the total readers, were far in the lead; the Democrats had 12 per cent, the Republicans 4 per cent and the Trotskyists 3 per cent), and young (67 per cent were under thirty-five; 22 per cent were students and another 22 per cent were in the armed forces.) \* The class alignment was about what one might expect: 78 per cent of the readers were middle-class professionals (as against 10 per cent in the population at large) and 13 per cent were wage-workers (as against 71 per cent nationally). The only surprise was that businessmen were repre-

\* Cf. "The Fascinated Readers," a report by Ruth Harper Mills on a questionnaire drawn up by C. Wright Mills and sent to our subscribers. This is in the Winter, 1948, issue, which also contains a four-year index. About the same time *The New Republic*, the liberal weekly, surveyed its readers. They turned out to be older, more conservative and prosperous and religious and female, less urban and well-educated.

sented just about as heavily as in the general population: 7 per cent v. 9 per cent. It was a responsive, irritable readership, who wrote many letters-to-the-editor, most of which I printed, especially the more unfavorable ones.

While I was editing *Politics* I often felt isolated, comparing my few thousand readers with the millions and millions of nonreaders—such is the power of the modern obsession with quantity, also of Marxism with its sentimentalization of "the masses." But in the last eight years I have run across so many nostalgic old readers in so many unexpected quarters that I have the impression I'm better known for *Politics* than for my articles in *The New Yorker*, whose circulation is roughly seventy times greater. This is curious but should not be surprising. A "little magazine" is often more intensively read (and circulated) than the big commercial magazines, being a more individual expression and so appealing with special force to other individuals of like minds. Being a one-man magazine, *Politics* was especially, some thought excessively, personal; it expressed my own temperament quite well, and any true mirror of an individual is in itself interesting. This freely personal note—which, as an editor, I welcomed in the contributions of others, my "formula" being to have none—this note, I think, is one reason there is still life and bite in the forty-two back numbers. The other is the period (1944–49), which was one when American intellectuals were beginning to feel uneasy about Marxism and yet retained enough interest in it to write about it; disillusion had not reached the stage of apathy; whence a tension that produced some good arguments. It was also a time of troubles: the terrible last years of the war, with the Nazi death-camps and the atomic bombings and the gray dawn of "peace," when the reality behind the illusions of the antifascist crusade began to emerge, with Stalin's Russia smoothly taking over the rôle of Hitler's Germany. All of this demanded attention, reporting, exposure, analysis, satire, indignation, lamentation.

The magazine, after the first two years, forsook the true Marxist faith to whore after the strange gods of anarchism

and pacifism.<sup>o</sup> This was partly a matter of my own evolution: now that I was out of the Marxian atmosphere of the Workers Party (also of *Partisan Review*, where my colleagues' mind-set, like Burnham's, retained its Marxist form though now filled with how different a content) my thinking took its natural bent toward individualism, empiricism, moralism, estheticism—all cardinal sins, that is deviations, in the Marxian canon. It was also partly a reaction to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two scientific experiments which gave the final push to my already tottering faith. Writing in 1944 I had defined the magazine's "values in general" as "scientific, materialistic, this-worldly, democratic, humanist—in the tradition of Rousseau, Jefferson, Darwin, Marx, Freud and Dewey." But from 1946 on only Freud and Jefferson remained of the culture heroes (like two ill-assorted creatures cast up as sole

<sup>o</sup> It was odd that anarchism took no root in the thirties, considering (1) the American temperament, lawless and individualistic, (2) the American anarchist tradition, from Benjamin Tucker to the Wobblies, and (3) that anarchism gave a better answer to the real modern problem, the encroachment of the State, than did Marxism, which was revolutionary only about bourgeois private property (not a real issue any more) and was thoroughly reactionary on the question of the State. But (3) also explains Marxism's popularity (though it doesn't justify it): while the centralized State is the chief danger now to freedom, it is also necessary to the operation of a mass society based on large-scale industry. Thus Marxism is "practical," since it fits into the *status quo*—as in Soviet Russia—while anarchism is "impractical" because it threatens it. The revolutionary alternative to the *status quo* today is not collectivized property administered by a "workers' state" whatever that means, but some kind of anarchist decentralization that will break up mass society into small communities where individuals can live together as variegated human beings instead of as impersonal units in the mass sum. The shallowness of the New Deal and the British Labour Party's postwar régime is shown by their failure to improve any of the important things in people's lives—the actual relationships on the job, the way they spend their leisure, and child-rearing and sex and art. It is mass living that vitiates all these today and the State that holds together the *status quo*. Marxism glorifies "the masses" and endorses the State. Anarchism leads back to the individual and the community, which is "impractical" but necessary—that is to say, it is revolutionary.

survivors of a flood), while "scientific" and "democratic" came under increasing suspicion because of their abuse by the industrialized mass society that had produced the atomic bomb.

In the spring of 1946 I published a two-part article, "The Root Is Man," whose title came from an early (1844) statement of Marx's: "*To be radical is to grasp the matter by its roots. Now the root for mankind is man.*" This was partly a demonstration that Marxism is no longer a reliable guide to either action or understanding, partly a discussion of the problem of values in politics and the limitations of the scientific method, partly some rather desperate suggestions for a new kind of radical approach—individualistic, decentralized, essentially anarchist. The crucial distinction was between "Progressive" and "Radical":

The Progressive makes history the center of his ideology. The Radical puts man there. The Progressive's attitude is optimistic both about human nature (which he thinks is basically good, hence all that is needed is to change institutions so as to give this goodness a chance to work) and about the possibility of understanding history through scientific method. The Radical is more aware of the dual nature of man; he sees evil as well as good at the base of human nature; he is skeptical about the ability of science to explain things beyond a certain point; he is aware of the tragic element in man's fate not only today but in any conceivable kind of society. The Progressive thinks in collective terms (the interests of society or of the working class); the Radical stresses individual conscience. The Progressive starts off from what is actually happening, the Radical from what he wants to happen. The former must have the feeling that history is on his side. The latter is pleased if history is also going his way, but he is stubborn about following his own road, that of "ought" rather than "is."

The Radical admits the validity of science in its own sphere, but thinks there also exists another sphere that is outside the reach of scientific investigation, one in which value-judgments cannot be *proved*, though they can be *demonstrated* in the traditional terms of art and ethical

teaching. The Radical sees any movement like socialism which aspires toward a better society as rooted in this second, non-scientific sphere, however its growth may be shaped by historical process. . . .

The Marxists still hold fast to the classic Left faith in human liberation through scientific progress, while admitting—some of them—that revisions of doctrine and refinements of method are necessary. This was my opinion until I began to edit *Politics* and consequently to follow in some detail the events of the last two years. The difficulties lie much deeper, I now think, than is assumed by the Progressives, and the crisis is much more serious.

It was, oddly enough, the emphasis on morality that caused the most scandal. "Macdonald's notions about politics are advanced under the banner of morality; actually they are neither political nor moral, being rather a peculiar hodgepodge of both," my former colleagues on *Partisan Review* observed in an editorial that reproached *Politics* for allegedly substituting "moral uplift" for "political realism." Yet some of the best things that appeared in *Politics* were "peculiar hodgepodes," such as Bruno Bettelheim's "Behavior in Extreme Situations"; Andrea Caffi's "Violence and Sociability"; Albert Camus' "Neither Victims nor Executioners"; Niccolo Tucci's regular column, "Commonsense"; and four articles by Simone Weil, especially "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force," written during the German occupation of France. What worried many of my old comrades was that an undue concern about morality might be a symptom of what Sidney Hook had called "the new failure of nerve," leading to idealism, obscurantism, and, horror of horrors, like the drunkard's grave, the church! *Time* also filed "morals" under "religion": two of the "hodgepodge" articles were reported on in the "Religion" department simply because the 20th-century mind seems unable to conceive of any other pigeon-hole for ethics. In actual fact, *Politics* showed slight interest in religion. My own record is impeccable: I am not now and have never been a member of any church. Nor have I ever, not even in late adolescence, believed in God or an afterlife or a power or

consciousness beyond this world that is interested in this world. Nor have I ever felt the need for such a belief, or even any interest in the whole question. Religion, in short, bores me even more than Marxism.

In the fall of 1947 I wrote a letter to the subscribers apologizing for not having got out an issue since the summer and promising to start up again—on a quarterly basis—early in 1948. "This has been a one-man magazine," I explained, "and the man has of late been feeling stale, tired, disheartened and—if you like—demoralized. . . . This mood seems to be due to three factors: (a) the ever blacker and bleaker political outlook; (b) my own growing sense of ignorance, which requires more time to investigate and reflect before sounding off in print; (c) the psychological demands of a one-man magazine which, at first stimulating, have latterly become simply—demands." The magazine did revive as a quarterly, but it was the beginning of the end. A year later the psychological factors had improved only slightly, and the money question had become acute, between an impressive rise in the cost of printing (in the first three years of *Politics* the printer's bill doubled—this by the way is one big reason there aren't more "little magazines" nowadays in the United States) and an equally impressive decline in my own bank account. So I gave up the magazine and went back to writing for my living (and my children's) after the thirteen-year sabbatical that had followed my resignation from *Fortune* in 1936. In recent years I have devoted most of my time to *The New Yorker*, where I have been able to write the kind of social-cultural reportage and analysis that now interests me more than political writing. This is an anticlimactic end to these memoirs of a revolutionist, but there it is, and there I am.

*Encounter,*  
March and April, 1957

Even the extermination of large numbers of helpless people is not so unknown in modern times as our own propagandists would have us think. Great numbers of the colored races have been wiped out since 1800 by the whites: the "rubber atrocities" of the Amazon and the Belgian Congo (cf. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*); the large scale executions that followed the Boxer Rebellion in China; the slaughter of the bulk of the Australian Black-fellows and the American Indians; not to mention dozens of lesser "episodes" throughout Asia and Africa. In England itself, furthermore, in the first half of the last century, millions of men, women and children of the working class were starved and worked to death in conditions which were often almost as brutal and degrading as those of Maidanek and which had the disadvantage of prolonging the victims' suffering much longer (cf. the Parliamentary "Blue Books" of the period, Engels' *Condition of the English Working Class* in 1844, or J. L. and Barbara Hammond's *Lord Shaftesbury*). And in Soviet Russia in the last fifteen years, millions of peasants and political prisoners have been starved to death in State-created famines or worked to death on forced-labor projects.

After the acids of sophisticated inquiry have done their worst, however, a considerable residue remains. It is this residue which makes the German atrocities in this war a phenomenon unique at least in modern history.

It is partly a question of the intimate individual cruelty shown in much of the Germans' behavior. That the Allied forces will execute hostages and burn down towns if "necessary" I have no doubt; but I should be surprised if they do it on the scale the Germans did (50 lives for one was the lowest "rate of exchange") or with the brutality and sadism

---

Army, however, sunk far below even this standard. The first few weeks of the Russian occupation of Eastern Germany, Austria, and Hungary were an orgy of unrestrained and wholesale raping and killing on a scale unknown in the West for many centuries. See the four terrible first-hand reports by survivors I printed in *Politics* (January 1946, pp. 4-8; October 1946, pp. 315-319). (1953)

But *someone* killed the Jews of Europe? And those who did were Germans. True. But a particular kind of Germans, specialists in torture and murder, whom it would be as erroneous to confuse with the general run of Germans as it would be to confuse the brutality-specialists who form so conspicuous a part of our own local police forces (and who occasionally burst out in such sensational horrors as the Chicago Memorial Day massacre) with the average run of Americans. It is of capital significance that the death camps for Jews and the mass killings of Russian prisoners of war have apparently not been entrusted to regular German Army units but rather to specially selected and trained SS squads. The Swedish journalist, Avid Fredborg, for example, has this interesting description in his book, *Behind the Steel Wall*: they have p. 63

SS soldiers forming the execution squads in the East are carefully chosen. They are recruited from the most brutal elements and are gradually trained to become harder and more ruthless. At first they may only have to take Jews out for street cleaning and snow shoveling. After a time they are assigned to perform single executions. Only after this training is completed are they ordered to do mass executions.

Many have refused to take part in these and have been shot. . . . Others have had nervous breakdowns and have been sent to asylums. Even the most hardened have at times caved in. Time and again, physicians have been called to attend soldiers on leave who have had severe attacks of hysteria or prolonged insomnia or delirium tremens (soldiers in the firing squads often get intoxicated before executions, and many stay so continually). . . .

The chief instrument for these ghastly practices is the SS. Sometimes it seems that the SS is driving the policy beyond the intention of the Party leaders. In any case, it is certain the German public has little real knowledge of what is going on.

Bruno Bettelheim's article on Nazi concentration camp life in the August, 1944 issue shows in detail how *given complete control over the individual*, it is possible to condition

working life of the individual, which goes on still along the traditional lines of Western civilization.<sup>°</sup>

Nazi Germany is often called "one big concentration camp," but one should not forget that this is a metaphor and not a literal description. Misled by the metaphor, some *Politics* readers have drawn from Bettelheim's article, for instance—the unwarranted conclusion that the whole German population—and even that of the occupied Europe of 1940–1943, which journalists also have called "one big concentration camp"—was being conditioned by the Nazis as effectively as the prisoners Bettelheim writes about. The fallacy in the case of Europe is apparent at a glance: as "Gallicus" showed in the January, 1945 issue, the Nazis failed to make much impression even on the youth, and soon found themselves confronted by an overwhelmingly hostile population—and, worse, corrupted by it. In Germany itself, the Nazis obviously could make more progress, since the German people were offered superior material rewards and since national hatred of a foreign conqueror was not involved. But even there it seems unlikely that propaganda and terrorism applied to a population still working and living in comparative (by concentration-camp standards) freedom have been sufficient to effectively Nazify a people the majority of whom were definitely anti-Nazi when Hitler assumed power in 1933. The very fact that concentration camps have continued to exist on a large scale is one proof of a continued popular opposition to Nazism, as are the scores of executions for "treason" which are still announced daily.†

---

<sup>°</sup> Stalin's regime has gone much further toward subjecting the whole population to "extreme situations" by "concentration-camp control" and "the more intimate types of conditioning" than Hitler's did. Morally, this makes the Russian people no more "responsible" than the German people were, but practically it does present a problem that, however painful, must be faced up to by pacifists and other men of good will. (1953)

† A wrong inference, I now believe. Perplexing though it is, the fact seems to be that, as Hannah Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (p. 379): "Terror increased both in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany in inverse ratio to the existence of internal polit-

It is a process, furthermore, which is also going on in our own society, in England, and in Russia—in the last-named perhaps<sup>o</sup> even faster and farther than in Germany itself. Modern society has become so tightly organized, so rationalized and routinized that it has the character of a mechanism which grinds on without human consciousness or control. The individual, be he “leader” or mass-man, is reduced to powerlessness vis-à-vis the mechanism. More and more, things happen TO people.

Some examples, mostly drawn from the “democratic” side in this war, may suggest what I mean:

A. The *New Yorker* of Aug. 12, 1944 ran a profile of a 22-year-old lieutenant in the Army Air Force who had just completed thirty bombing missions in the European theater. He seemed to be of superior intelligence, not politically radical; his main personal interest was in jazz music. “Whatever I tell you,” he said to the interviewer, “boils down to this: I’m a cog in one hell of a big machine. The more I think about it, and I’ve thought about it a lot lately, the more it looks as if I’d been a cog in one thing after another since the day I was born. Whenever I get set to do what I want to do, something a whole lot bigger than me comes along and shoves me back into place. It’s not especially pleasant, but there it is.” The lieutenant’s personal aspirations would seem modest and attainable enough: to live with his wife, to have a home, to play and hear good jazz. Our society has been unable to give him these satisfactions. Instead, it puts him in the plexiglass nose of a bomber and sends him out to kill his fellow men and destroy their homes, at the most terrible psychological cost to himself, as the profile makes clear. Society is not ungrateful, however: the lieutenant wears

---

seem worth wasting any more space on here. Combating it is a task for the propagandist, not for the analyst: like the Nazis’ ideas on the Jewish people, it is as easy to refute on the scientific plane as it is difficult to combat on the psychological level. It seems more fruitful here to discuss a more sophisticated and tenable theory of German collective responsibility.

<sup>o</sup> I would now delete this word. (1953)

but one another, and had no notion of what was happening or who was fighting whom.

It would round the story off neatly if they were now conscripted into the British Army and sent to fight the Japanese, ending up somewhere in Central Asia, quite close to their native village, but still very much puzzled as to what it is all about.

#### 4. POLITICAL ANIMISM—THE THEORY OF THE "ORGANIC STATE"

The above instances suggest that the difference between "civilized" and "primitive" social organization is growing less. The great circle is slowly closing, and a contemporary Soviet or German citizen would feel more in common with an Australian bushman in many ways than with, let us say, a French *philosophe* of 1780 or a Jeffersonian democrat of 1810. In place of the rigid, unexamined customs which determine the individual's behavior in primitive communities, there is substituted today a complex politico-economic organization which is equally "given" and not-to-be-criticized in its ultimate aims and assumptions, and which overrides with equal finality the individual's power of choice.

The parallel goes farther. As primitive man endowed natural forces with human animus, so modern man attributes to a nation or a people qualities of will and choice that belong in reality only to individuals. The reasons are the same in both cases: to reduce mysterious and uncontrollable forces to a level where they may be dealt with. The cave dweller feels much more comfortable about a thunderstorm if he can explain it as the rage of someone like himself only bigger, and the urban cave dwellers of our time feel much better about war if they can think of the enemy nation as a person like themselves only bigger, which can be collectively punched in the nose for the evil actions it collectively chooses to do. If the German people are not "responsible" for "their" nation's war crimes, the world becomes a complicated and terrifying place, in which un-understood social forces move

men puppetlike to perform terrible acts, and in which guilt is at once universal and meaningless. Unhappily, the world is in fact such a place.

One of the reasons anthropology is so interesting to the politically-minded today is because its method of observation, already used successfully on primitive societies, can be applied very usefully to contemporary society, and is already being so applied by Dollard, Benedict, the Lynds and others. May we not, indeed, expect some future historian to write of us as one scholar has written of the ancient Hebrews:

"They explained nearly all phenomena by the direct action of superhuman and invisible persons and powers, resembling the human spirit. Like the 'primitives,' they recognized no essential difference between the spiritual and the material. Like them, too, they conceived of a solidarity, or more accurately, a practical identity, between many beings, events and things which we regard as absolutely distinct."

This animistic confusion marks the common man's thinking (with plenty of help from his political rulers) not only on relations between nations but also on the relation between the State and the individual citizen. Precisely because in this sphere the individual is most powerless in reality, do his rulers make their greatest efforts to present the State not only as an instrument for *his* purposes but as an extension of *his* personality. They have to try to do this because of the emphasis on the free individual which the bourgeois revolution has made part of our political assumptions (for how long?)

Hegel, who developed an anti-individualist theory of Statism while the cannons of the Napoleonic wars were still echoing, saw the problem clearly and tried to meet it in such terms as these:

In the State, everything depends upon the unity of the universal and the particular. In the ancient States, the subjective purpose was absolutely one with the will of the State. In modern times, on the contrary, we demand an individual opinion, an individual will and conscience. The ancients had none of these in the modern sense; the final

ing rebellious behavior treason not only to those in authority but also to the alleged common interests of everybody, to what is reverently termed "national unity" these days; in time of war, it makes it possible to treat the enemy population as a homogeneous single block, all of them equally wicked and detestable. This second use is what concerns us here: it is the theoretical underpinning of the concept that the German people are responsible for the horrors of Nazism.

But if everyone is guilty, then no one is guilty. The dialectics of this are wonderfully illustrated in an anecdote quoted by Hannah Arendt ("Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," *Jewish Frontier*, January, 1945) from *PM* of Nov. 12, 1944. An American correspondent interviews an official of a "death camp" who had fallen into the hands of the Russians:

Q. Did you kill people in the camp? A. Yes.

Q. Did you poison them with gas? A. Yes.

Q. Did you bury them alive? A. It sometimes happened.

Q. Did you personally help to kill people? A. Absolutely not. I was only paymaster in the camp.

Q. What did you think of what was going on? A. It was bad at first, but we got used to it.

Q. Do you know the Russians will hang you? A. (bursting into tears) Why should they? What have I done?

*What have I done?* These words ring true. One feels that the worthy paymaster—imagine the civilization that has produced the job of paymaster in a death camp!—is sincerely outraged by the proposal to hang him for his part in killing several million human beings. What had he done indeed? Simply obeyed orders and kept his mouth shut. It was what he had *not* done that shocks our moral sensibilities. But from the standpoint of the Organic State he is no more and no less guilty than every other person in Germany and deserves hanging no more and no less. Soldiers must obey their officers, just as citizens must obey the law. Stalin and Roosevelt would certainly not permit their own soldiers to discriminate, on the frivolous grounds of personal conscience, between one

—these have been carried over into the political sphere. The result is that, as we have seen above, the individual has little choice about his behavior, and can be made to function, by the pressure and terror wielded by the masters of the Organic State, in ways quite opposed to any he would voluntarily choose. I have been told that the Nazis created a Jewish section of the Gestapo and that these creatures were much more feared by their fellow Jews than were the regular Gestapo men, since they would never dare take a bribe or show the slightest good nature. There were also Jewish policemen in the Warsaw ghetto, working loyally with the Nazis. We may imagine the pressure against these individuals, and their families, which produced this behavior. And doubtless some Jews refused to play the role, and took the consequences. But probably not very many, for such Jews were heroes, and there are not many heroes among the Jews or among any other peoples today (except primitive folk like the Greeks and the Poles). Our paymaster was not a hero, and the Russians hung him for not being one—as they would have hung him for being one in *their* State.\*

With their usual unerring cynicism, the Nazis exploit this moral weakness in the German people—that they are not heroes. The official SS organ recently editorialized:

There are no innocents in Germany. We have not yet met a single German who for political reasons had refused marriage, children, family support, reductions of taxes or paid vacations only because National Socialism had made them possible. On the contrary, they grew fat and stout under the prosperity of National Socialism. They felt no pangs of conscience at the "Aryanization" of Jewish businesses. They had their full share in the prosperity. And they shouted "Hurrah" to our victories. . . . There were,

\* Since the war ended, we have had much experience, most of it depressing, in trying to assess criminal responsibility for political crimes. The de-Nazification program and the Nuremberg Trials got all snarled up in the Responsibility of Peoples. That bewildering concept also transmuted the whole population of Berlin in three years from Nazi beasts to democratic heroes. See "The Germans—Three Years Later." (1953)

it is true, lamblike innocents who did not want to declare war upon any country and who did for the German war effort only as much as they had to. But even these did not object to making money from the war or from National Socialism. They liked to ride in their new cars on our new highways and to travel on our "Strength through Joy" excursions. Nobody, after all, has preferred a democratic death to a National Socialist life.

(Editorial in *Das Schwarze Korps*, quoted in the *Neue Volkszeitung*, New York City, for Feb. 10, 1945.)

The *Schwarze Korps*, of course, exaggerates: as we shall presently see, scores of Germans every day "prefer" (at least get—which I admit is not necessarily quite the same thing) a "democratic death" to a "National Socialist life." But, from the Organic standpoint, it is quite true that "no one is innocent." With their customary political logic, the Nazis of late have deliberately tried to involve the whole German people in the moral responsibility for their crimes. In her brilliant article in the *Jewish Frontier*, Hannah Arendt describes this process and its political consequences.

The terror-organizations, which were at first strictly separated from the mass of the people, admitting only persons who could show a criminal past or prove their preparedness to become criminals, have since been continually expanded. . . . Whereas those crimes which have always been a part of the daily routine of concentration camps since the beginning of the Nazi regime were at first a jealously guarded monopoly of the SS and Gestapo, today members of the Wehrmacht are assigned at will to the duties of mass murder. These crimes were at first kept secret by every possible means and any publication of such reports was made punishable as atrocity propaganda. Later, however, such reports were spread by Nazi-organized whispering campaigns and today these crimes are openly proclaimed under the title of "measures of liquidation" in order to force "Volksgenossen" whom difficulties of organization made it impossible to induct into the "Volksgemeinschaft" of crime at least to bear the onus of complicity and awareness of what was going on. These tactics resulted in a victory for the Nazis, and the Allies

Roosevelt are agreed on one thing at least: that the German people's destiny is identical with that of the Nazis. On the one hand, we have the Nazis organizing a popular *maquis* to carry on the struggle against the Allies for years after the war, pointing to the Morgenthau Plan as conclusive evidence of the Jewish plot against Germany, and telling the German people—with the novel advantage that the propaganda is true—that there is no alternative except a fight to the bitter end under Hitler's leadership. On the other hand, we have the Big Three insisting on "unconditional surrender" (a formula, let us note, which was evolved not by the totalitarian Stalin nor the Tory Churchill but by the common man's friend, Roosevelt), proposing to enslave millions of German males, to reduce Germany to a semi-agricultural status, etc. Thus from both sides of the battle-lines, the German people are told that the Nazis' survival is their only hope of survival, that the Nazis *are Germany* (a claim the Nazis have long made but up to now have been unable to get generally accepted).

For one curious result of the "all-are-guilty" line, which is put forward by those who profess the utmost detestation of Nazism, is that it makes Nazism (or its equivalent called by some other name) the logical *postwar* form of regime for defeated Germany. This comes out nakedly if one considers the most fully developed "organic" theory on Germany—that, fittingly enough, propounded by the Nazis' fellow totalitarian regime in Russia. One finds Moscow promoting hatred of Germans as Germans (not only as Nazis) and proposing the most Draconic treatment of Germany after the war, and at the same time encouraging German military nationalism through the Von Seidlitz officers' committee. A contradiction? Only superficially. The "organic" theory leads precisely to the retention of the Nazis and *junkers* as the German people's rulers. The logic: all are guilty; therefore no one is more guilty than another; therefore, the Nazis and the *junkers* are no more guilty than their opponents; therefore, if it is convenient—and it is convenient—it is permissible to keep the Nazis and *junkers* (except a few that are hung for demon-

of these have been ordered to their stations and barracks, to await further orders. Among them are the Hitler Youth, the Nazi Police, and the SS." Some all-are-guilty enthusiasts even insist that the German people are so despicable that they *deserve* to be ruled forever by the Nazis! Thus the most extreme anti-Nazism turns into its dialectical opposite.

So much for the effect on the German people of the collective responsibility theory. It is equally disastrous for the Allied peoples. Last summer everyone thought the war in Europe would be over by the fall. The Anglo-Americans had broken out of Normandy and were racing across France in pursuit of the disorganized German armies; the Russians were advancing on all their fronts; an attempt on Hitler's life was almost successful; the popular mood inside Germany was one of panic and loss of confidence in Hitler's leadership. At that moment, it would not have taken much political pressure to pry loose the people from the Nazis and to bring the whole structure down. Instead of applying this pressure, the Allies reiterated the "unconditional surrender" line, embellished with such grace notes as the Morgenthau Plan. They succeeded in convincing the German people, as Hitler's most frenetic orations could not have convinced them, that their only hope was to stand firm behind the Nazis. To make sure the Germans didn't miss the point, the American High Command staged a special demonstration at Aachen, the first sizable German city our troops reached. Aachen was defended by a single second-rate division, reinforced by one SS unit and a few fortress troops. The defenders cooperated splendidly with the attackers: for one week, the city, ringed with American divisions and artillery units, was bombed and shelled. It was finally taken "the hard way," by an all-out infantry assault backed up by tanks and God knows what else. Militarily, not exactly brilliant. But politically sound enough, for the city was reduced to rubble, thousands of its inhabitants were killed (and a good many American soldiers, too), and notice was served on all Germany (and on the Americans) of what was in store for it (and them).

It is not worth wasting printer's ink to prove that, mili-

interior politics, and the most atrocious act of all." (*Politics*, February, 1945.)

The common peoples of the world are coming to have less and less control over the policies of "their" governments, while at the same time they are being more and more closely identified with those governments. Or to state it in slightly different terms: as the common man's *moral* responsibility diminishes (assuming agreement that the degree of moral responsibility is in direct proportion to the degree of freedom of choice), his *practical* responsibility increases. Not for many centuries have individuals been at once so powerless to influence what is done by the national collectivities to which they belong, and at the same time so generally held responsible for what is done by those collectivities.

Where can the common peoples look for relief from this intolerable agonizing contradiction? Not to their traditional defender, the labor movement. This no longer exists in Russia, and in the two great bourgeois democracies, it has quite lost touch with the humane and democratic ideals it once believed in. Last fall, the British Trade Union Congress endorsed, 5 to 1, a statement that the German people are responsible for the crimes of Nazism; and a few weeks later the CIO convention over here resolved: "The German people must . . . atone for the crimes and horrors which they have visited on the earth." Such international working-class solidarity as once existed has vanished, and the workers of the world, including and especially those of the Soviet Union, are as brutally and rabidly nationalistic—in *their capacity as organized workers*—as their own ruling classes are.

We must look both more widely and more deeply for relief from the dilemma of increasing political impotence accompanied by increasing political responsibility. To our essential humanity and to a more sensitive and passionate respect for our own and other people's humanity.

Harold Denny in the *N. Y. Times* of Feb. 18, 1945, tells the story of a captured SS private. He was a young Ukrainian farmer who was impressed into the SS when the Germans retreated from Russia last summer. Fed up, apathetic, with-

strosity. Last April, I noted that in our movies "the white coat of the scientist is as blood-chilling a sight as Dracula's black cape. . . . If the scientist's laboratory has acquired in Popular Culture a ghastly atmosphere, is this not perhaps one of those deep intuitions of the masses? From Frankenstein's laboratory to Maidanek [or, now, to Hanford and Oak Ridge] is not a long journey. Was there a popular suspicion, perhaps only half conscious, that the 19th century trust in science was mistaken . . . ?"

These questions seem more and more relevant. I doubt if we shall get satisfactory answers from the scientists (who, indeed, seem professionally incapable even of asking, let alone answering, them). The greatest of them all, who in 1905 constructed the equation which provided the theoretical basis for Atomic Fission, could think of nothing better to tell us after the bombings than: "No one in the world should have any fear or apprehension about atomic energy being a supernatural product. In developing atomic energy, science merely imitated the reaction of the sun's rays. ["Merely" is good!—DM] Atomic power is no more unnatural than when I sail my boat on Saranac Lake." Thus, Albert Einstein. As though it were not precisely the natural, the perfectly rational and scientifically demonstrable that is now chilling our blood! How human, intimate, friendly by comparison are ghosts, witches, spells, werewolves and poltergeists! Indeed, all of us except a few specialists know as much about witches as we do about atom-splitting; and all of us with no exceptions are even less able to defend ourselves against The Bomb than against witchcraft. No silver bullet, no crossed sticks will help us there. As though to demonstrate this, Einstein himself, when asked about the unknown radioactive poisons which were beginning to alarm even editorial writers, replied "emphatically": "I will not discuss that." Such emphasis is not reassuring.

Nor was President Truman reassuring when he pointed out: "This development, which was carried forward by the many thousand participants with the utmost energy and the

very highest sense of national duty . . . probably represents the greatest achievement of the combined efforts of science, industry, labor and the military in all history." Nor Professor Smyth: "The weapon has been created not by the devilish inspiration of some warped genius but by the arduous labor of thousands of normal men and women working for the safety of their country." Again, the effort to "humanize" The Bomb by showing how it fits into our normal, everyday life also cuts the other way: it reveals how inhuman our normal life has become.

The pulp writers could imagine things like the atom bomb; in fact, life is becoming more and more like a Science Fiction story, and the arrival on earth of a few six-legged Martians with Death Rays would hardly make the front page. But the pulp writers' imaginations were limited; *their* atom bombs were created by "devilish" and "warped" geniuses, not by "thousands of normal men and women"—including some of the most eminent scientists of our time, the labor movement (the army "warmly" thanked the AFL and the CIO for achieving "what at times seemed impossible provision of adequate manpower"), various great corporations (DuPont, Eastman, Union Carbon & Carbide), and the president of Harvard University.

Only a handful, of course, knew what they were creating. None of the 125,000 construction and factory workers knew. Only three of the plane crew that dropped the first bomb knew what they were letting loose. It hardly needs to be stressed that there is something askew with a society in which vast numbers of citizens can be organized to create a horror like The Bomb without even knowing they are doing it. What real content, in such a case, can be assigned to notions like "democracy" and "government of, by and for the people"? The good Professor Smyth expresses the opinion that "the people of this country" should decide for themselves about the future development of The Bomb. To be sure, no vote was taken on the creation and employment of the weapon. However, says the Professor reassuringly, these questions "have been seriously considered by all con-

cerned [i.e., by the handful of citizens who were permitted to know what was going on] and vigorously debated among the scientists, and the conclusions reached have been passed along to the highest authorities.

"These questions are not technical questions; they are political and social questions, and the answers given to them may affect all mankind for generations. In thinking about them, the men on the project have been thinking as citizens of the United States vitally interested in the welfare of the human race. It has been their duty and that of the responsible high Government officials who were informed to look beyond the limits of the present war and its weapons to the ultimate implications of these discoveries. This was a heavy responsibility.

"In a free country like ours, such questions should be debated by the people and decisions must be made by the people through their representatives."

It would be unkind to subject the above to critical analysis beyond noting that every statement of what-is contradicts every statement of what-should-be.

Atomic fission makes me sympathize, for the first time, with the old Greek notion of *Hubris*, that lack of restraint in success which invited the punishment of the gods. Some scientist remarked the other day that it was fortunate that the only atom we as yet know how to split is that of uranium, a rare substance; for if we should learn how to split the atom of iron or some other common ore, the chain reaction might flash through vast areas and the molten interior of the globe come flooding out to put an end to us and our Progress. It is *Hubris* when President Truman declares: "The force from which the sun draws its powers has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East." Or when the *Times* editorialist echoes: "The American answer to Japan's contemptuous rejection of the Allied surrender ultimatum of July 26 has now been delivered upon Japanese soil in the shape of a new weapon which unleashes against it the forces of the universe." Invoking the Forces of the Universe to back up

the ultimatum of July 26 is rather like getting in God to tidy up the living room.

It seems fitting that The Bomb was not developed by any of the totalitarian powers, where the political atmosphere might at first glance seem to be more suited to it, but by the two "democracies," the last major powers to continue to pay at least ideological respect to the humanitarian-democratic tradition. It also seems fitting that the heads of these governments, by the time The Bomb exploded, were not Roosevelt and Churchill, figures of a certain historical and personal stature, but Attlee and Truman, both colorless mediocrities, Average Men elevated to their positions by the mechanics of the system. All this emphasizes that perfect automatism, that absolute lack of human consciousness or aims which our society is rapidly achieving. As a uranium "pile," once the elements have been brought together, inexorably runs through a series of "chain reactions" until the final explosion takes place, so the elements of our society act and react, regardless of ideologies or personalities, until The Bomb explodes over Hiroshima. The more commonplace the personalities and senseless the institutions, the more grandiose the destruction. It is *Götterdämmerung* without the gods.

The scientists themselves whose brain-work produced The Bomb appear not as creators but as raw material, to be hauled about and exploited like uranium ore. Thus, Dr. Otto Hahn, the German scientist who in 1939 first split the uranium atom and who did his best to present Hitler with an atom bomb, has been brought over to this country to pool his knowledge with our own atomic "team" (which includes several Jewish refugees who were kicked out of Germany by Hitler). Thus Professor Kaputza, Russia's leading experimenter with uranium, was decoyed from Cambridge University in the thirties back to his native land, and, once there, refused permission to return. Thus a recent report from Yugoslavia tells of some eminent native atom-splitter being high-jacked by the Red Army (just like a valuable machine tool) and rushed by plane to Moscow.

Insofar as there is any moral responsibility assignable for The Bomb, it rests with those scientists who developed it and those political and military leaders who employed it. Since the rest of us Americans did not even know what was being done in our name—let alone have the slightest possibility of stopping it—The Bomb becomes the most dramatic illustration to date of the fallacy of “The Responsibility of Peoples.”

Yet how can even those immediately concerned be held responsible? A general's function is to win wars, a president's or prime minister's to defend the interests of the ruling class he represents, a scientist's to extend the frontiers of knowledge; how can any of them, then, draw the line at the atom bomb, or indeed anywhere, regardless of their “personal feelings”? The dilemma is absolute, when posed in these terms. The social order is an impersonal mechanism, the war is an impersonal process, and they grind along automatically; if some of the human parts rebel at their function, they will be replaced by more amenable ones; and their rebellion will mean that they are simply thrust aside, without changing anything. The Marxists say this must be so until there is a revolutionary change; but such a change never seemed farther away. What, then, can a man do now? How can he escape playing his part in the ghastly process?

Quite simply by not playing it. Many eminent scientists, for example, worked on The Bomb: Fermi of Italy, Bohr of Denmark, Chadwick of England, Oppenheimer, Urey and Compton of USA. It is fair to expect such men, of great knowledge and intelligence, to be aware of the consequences of their actions. And they seem to have been so. Dr. Smyth observes: “Initially, many scientists could and did hope that some principle would emerge which would prove that atomic bombs were inherently impossible. The hope has faded gradually. . . .” Yet they all accepted the “assignment,” and produced The Bomb. Why? Because they thought of themselves as specialists, technicians, and not as complete men. Specialists in the sense that the process of scientific discovery is considered to be morally neutral, so that the scientist may deplore the uses to which his discoveries are put by the gen-

erals and politicians but may not refuse to make them for that reason; and specialists also in that they reacted to the war as partisans of one side, whose function was the narrow one of defeating the Axis governments even if it meant sacrificing their broader responsibilities as human beings.

But, fortunately for the honor of science, a number of scientists refused to take part in the project. I have heard of several individual cases over here, and Sir James Chadwick has revealed “that some of his colleagues refused to work on the atomic bomb for fear they might be creating a planet-destroying monster.” These scientists reacted as whole men, not as special-ists or part-isans. Today the tendency is to think of peoples as responsible and individuals as irresponsible. The reversal of both these conceptions is the first condition of escaping the present decline to barbarism. The more each individual thinks and behaves as a whole Man (hence responsibly) rather than as a specialized part of some nation or profession (hence irresponsibly), the better hope for the future. To insist on acting as a responsible individual in a society which reduces the individual to impotence may be foolish, reckless, and ineffectual; or it may be wise, prudent and effective. But whichever it is, only thus is there a chance of changing our present tragic destiny. All honor then to the as yet anonymous British and American scientists—Men I would rather say—who were so wisely foolish as to refuse their cooperation on The Bomb! This is “resistance,” this is “negativism,” and in it lies our best hope.

September, 1945

**T**HE NEW YORKER did a bold thing when it devoted its entire issue of August 31 to John Hersey's long reportage piece on Hiroshima. It was also a useful thing, judging by the popular sensation the issue seems to have caused. For what Hersey tried to do was to “bring home” to the American reader just