

KOESTLER

*The Yogi and the Commissar*

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Umschlag des Buchs ist ein etwas unregelmäßig  
inhaltreiches 66-Blatt. Der  
Lage nach ist es ein für die Zeit  
gutes.

in der Opfoll: In der Opfoll, jedoch  
Opfoll hat eher f. 22 ist Opfoll  
von einer Opfoll.

Die same vage füll - the time

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# The Yogi and the Commissar

AND OTHER ESSAYS

by Arthur Koestler



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Unfortunately we have as yet no scientific terminology to describe these processes, which are of vital importance for the understanding of the "subjective factor" in History. Hence the more soberly one tries to describe them the more vague imagery one has, *faute de mieux*, to use. The enormous literature of the three main contemporary schools in psychology contains not a single case history of this conversion, the revolutionary's transformation into a cynic or mystic, whereas history, past and present, abounds in examples. Jung comes nearest to the question: his interpretation of the subconscious bears most resemblance to the "umbilical cord," but he prefers to study its effects on the most unsuitable human type, the wealthy middle-aged Babbitts. And this for good reason: were he to choose his patients among the type which inhabits the German or Russian concentration camps, his therapy would not only prove to be inadequate but he would have to introduce so many new determining factors into his system that both his terminology and his *Weltanschauung* would go to blazes. The Commissar's spectral displacements are *terra nova* for the psychologist.

Turning to the more muddled, intermediary bands of the spectrum we find that their reactions to the mystic current are of a revealing nature. In the pink regions the reaction first manifests itself by an intense consciousness of the Left's serial defeats, of disgust with the old parties, disgust with their worn-out leaders, with plans and promises, ideas and ideals, and most of all with one's own foolish and frustrated hopes. This pink hangover is the emotional starting point. Next comes the realisation that "there must have been something basically wrong in our approach to the Masses." Next to this the discovery that on the very point where they failed—activation of the masses—fascism was horribly successful. Now the feeling which success inspires in the unsuccessful is envy. If we look at things closely we find indeed that the pink attitude to fascism is envy rather than hatred.

There is one definite profiteer of the spectral displacement: the Scientist. In a certain sense it was he who started the movement; then its momentum carried him further than he probably liked.

One should remember that the irrational or ultra-violet element which so strongly taints present-day physics, biology, and psychology was not a philosophical fashion smuggled into the laboratories, but grew out of the laboratories themselves and created the new philosophical climate. The most striking example is the development of physics which was an enormously successful rational Commissar-science up to the closing years of the last century and has since become more and more of a Yogi-science. Matter, substance, time, space, causality, precision of measurement and the belief in the predictability of behaviour of the Measured have run like sand through the physicist's fingers until nothing remained but a group of formal statements of this type: "If a small poker-die is so constructed that we have no reason to assume a preference on its part for falling on the ace-side, then we are entitled to expect that, in the course of a great number of casts, it will show no preference for falling on the ace-side."

This is undeniably a precise statement, but a rather modest one in relation to our hunger for the mysteries of the Universe explained to us. The modern physicist of course denies that his task should be to "explain" anything, and he takes a masochistic delight in producing formulae which establish with precision the degree of imprecision in his statements, i.e., the inadequacy of physics not only to explain but even to describe what exactly is going on in the physical world. Some time ago Laplace thought that if a superior intelligence counted all atoms and their velocities at a given moment he could predict all future events to the end of the world, including the brand of Mr. Churchill's cigars. Physicists and philosophers of the last Commissar period tried to jolly around the fatalistic trap of physical determinism, but there was no escape from it. In nineteenth century physics the world was running down like a clockwork without freedom, except the arbitrariness of the initial state and of the initial choice of a certain set of "Natural Laws" which governed the mechanism. In twentieth century physics this initial arbitrariness or freedom is evenly distributed in minute quantities over all possible cross-sections in time and space; the initial creation has become a *creatio continua*. "Freedom" and "arbitrariness"



## IV

Being a contemporary of ours, what he feels will be mainly agony. In other periods it may seem that to care for politics is a temptation for the artist. In periods like the present the temptation is not to care for politics.

Yet whatever his convictions may be, any idea—political, philosophical, scientific—has novel-life and *raison d'être* only if assimilated by the characters of the novel. In the true novel, as opposed to reportage and chronicle, the main action takes place inside the character's skull and ribs. Thus both facts and ideas are conveyed only after a double process of digestion.

It is a strange and sometimes painful process. When I think of the species Novelist, I am always reminded of certain strange practices of the Australian white ant. The normal ants of this species are not able to benefit by the food within their reach owing to an insufficiency of their digestive apparatus. They would all die of starvation but for the existence of certain specialized workers who gather the harvest, select, devour and digest the food, and feed all the others, the queen, the workers, and the winged adults, with the contents of their stomach. In some species these workers never leave the nest; they hang head downwards in the dark vaults and tunnels of the termitary, and in the absence of other receptacles become living reservoirs, cisterns, honey-pots—with enormous elastic, distended bellies into which the harvest is poured, to be pumped out when folk are hungry.

Hanging head downwards in the dark vaults of our termitary, feeding warriors and winged adults with the assimilated products of a bitter and poisonous harvest, the artist of today is inclined towards rather sinister thoughts. At times he feels as if he were the only adult surrounded by beings still at the stage of befouling themselves. Hence his urge and duty in a world where nobody is well: *the duty not to accept.*

In fact all the temptations I mentioned have one common denominator: the temptation to accept. To close the window *pour embrasser l'absolu*, means to accept the madness outside as incurable,

to shirk responsibility. To leave the window ajar and hide the more unpleasant sights means acceptance by complacency. Complacency is passive complicity, and in this sense all art is propaganda, by omission or commission. But only in this sense. Conscious propaganda means the artist's abdication and is only another form of escape—escape into the happy fields of dilettantism where all problems and difficulties are easily solved.

The artist is no leader; his mission is not to solve but to expose, not to preach but to demonstrate. "We make out of our quarrels with others rhetoric, but with our quarrels with ourselves, poetry," said Yeats. The healing, the teaching and preaching he must leave to others; but by exposing the truth by special means unavailable to them, he creates the emotional urge for healing.

Thus the writer has a definite social task and function to fulfil. When embarking on a novel the author is not unlike the captain of a vessel setting out on a voyage with sealed orders in his pocket. But when he opens the envelope after having put out to sea, he finds that the order is written in invisible ink. Unable to read it, he is yet constantly aware of a duty to perform. For he is a captain of a warship, not of a pleasure cruiser. The indecipherable yet imperative orders in his pocket fill him with the consciousness of his responsibility. This is the greatness of the writer's mission; this is his predicament.

only waiting to be picked up, as the Jacobins picked up the Encyclopaedists.

This picking up, however, is the function of a special type of people; the liaison agents between the way we live and the way we *could* live according to the contemporary level of objective knowledge. Those who are snugly tucked into the social hierarchy have obviously no strong impulse towards independent thought. Where should it come from? They have no reason to destroy their accepted values nor any desire to build new ones. The thirst for knowledge is mainly confined to situations where the unknown is disquieting; the happy are rarely curious. On the other hand, the great majority of the oppressed, the underdogs, lack the opportunity or the objectivity or both, for the pursuit of independent thought. They accept or reject the existing values; both attitudes are inarticulate and unobjective. Thus the function of co-ordination between the two concepts Homo and Sapiens falls to those sandwiched in between two layers, and exposed to the pressure of both. The intelligentsia is a kind of sensitive, porous membrane stretched between media of different properties.

One should not, however, confound them with the middle classes as such. Sensitivity, searching and groping are attitudes which presuppose a certain amount of frustration—not too much and not too little; a kind of moderate unhappiness, a harmonious disequilibrium. The upper strata, which accept the traditional values, lack this frustration; the bottom strata have too much of it—to the degree of being either paralysed or discharging it in convulsive fits. Further, it must be a *specific* frustration—the discontent of the professional man, writer, artist, who rebel not because society has deprived them of every chance, crushed and buried them in pit or workshop, but because they have been given a margin large enough to develop their gifts, but too narrow to make them feel smug and accept the given order of things. For the smug, thinking is a luxury, for the frustrated a necessity. And as long as the chasm between thought and tradition, theoretical insight and practical routine prevails, thinking must necessarily be directed by the two poles of debunking and Utopianism.



garia, and even in the International Brigades of Spain, they gave an excellent account of themselves. But from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, the workers of Central and Western Europe had rapidly developed their own organisations, parties, trade unions, produced their own leaders and, above all, their own bureaucracy—men with iron wills and wooden heads. In an age of accelerated developments, the organised Fourth Estate had become stagnant much quicker than the Third in its time, and without even ascending to power. The crumbs of material improvements and the shadow of political influence which various sections of the Second International had wrung from the rulers were enough to paralyse their impetus. Members of the Western intelligentsia could become Labour members of Parliament, editors of Left papers, lecturers in dreary evening classes; but there were no rocks to move with the lever of "independent thought." Towards the end of the century the Western intelligentsia had only the choice to be either bourgeois decadents or proletarian schoolmasters. Their groups and cliques developed according to these alternative poles, with a spectrum ranging from the French Symbolists through the "George-Kreis" to the Fabians. Compare Shaw with Voltaire, Léon Blum with St. Just, and you get the difference—not so much in stature as in historical opportunity.

The shake-up of the First World War seemed to create a new opportunity for a general debunking and rebuilding. The whole body of ideas had undergone a radical transformation: Relativity and Quantum mechanics, Hormonology and Psycho-analysis, Leninism and Behaviourism, Aviation and Wireless, Expressionism and Surrealism—a completely new universe had taken shape in the library; and the dazzling light it radiated drove the intelligentsia half crazy by its contrast to the anachronistic, dusty-musty traditions still governing everyday conduct and beliefs. What a historical opportunity for debunking and rebuilding; but where were the allies to carry it out? The sensitive membrane vibrated wildly; but there was no resonance-body attached to it. Utopian striving during those two decades was monopolized by the Third International, whose blue-print for the European revolution was shaped on the conditions

of a country with 80 per cent illiterates and a ratio of rural to urban population of ten to one. During the two decades of its existence the revolutionary movement was focused on and governed by that semi-Asiatic dictatorship. Its European extension needed not intellectuals, but a ruthless and uncritically obedient bureaucracy. The few members of the Western intelligentsia who were accepted into its ranks lost first the right, and soon even the desire for "independent thought"; they became fanatic sectarians and Party-hacks, while the best among them met a tragic end. Particularly tragic was the fate of the revolutionary intelligentsia in the country where revolution seemed almost within reach, Germany. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered in 'eighteen. Paul Levy committed suicide after his expulsion from the C.P., Ruth Fischer, also expelled, vanished into obscurity, Toller hanged himself in New York, Muehsam was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp, Max Hoelz was drowned under dubious circumstances in Russia, Heinz Neumann, the last surviving C.P. leader who came from the intelligentsia, was liquidated.

But the bulk of the Western intelligentsia were never admitted to this bloody Olympus. They were not wanted, had to remain fellow-travellers, the fifth wheel to the cart. The intelligentsia of the Pink Decade was irresponsible, because it was deprived of the privilege of responsibility. Left in the cold, suspended in a vacuum, they became decadents of the bourgeoisie. It was nobody's fault; for they were the mirror, not the light.

I am trying neither to whitewash nor to accuse. The intelligentsia is part of the social body, its most sensitive part; when the body is ill, the skin develops a rash. The deterioration of the intelligentsia is as much a symptom of disease as the corruption of the ruling class or the sleeping sickness of the proletariat. They are symptoms of the same fundamental process. To sneer at the intelligentsia and, while depriving it of the responsibility of action, shove on to it the responsibility of failure, is either thoughtless stupidity or a manoeuvre with obvious motives. Nazism knew exactly what it was doing when it exterminated the intelligentsia of the European Continent.



## V

## THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND NEUROSIS

This sensitive membrane stretches not only between heterogeneous social classes, but between the social body as a whole and its environment. It is tempting, and perhaps not entirely futile, to follow up this metaphor for a while. It is the surface, the ectoderm, philogenetically the rind of the plasmatic bubble, which provides the tissues for the nerves, the spinal cord and the brain in the embryo. The central nervous system is derived not, as one would expect, from the inside, the sheltered parts, the core; but from the exposed surface, permanently submitted to the bombardment of external stimuli, to irritation and excitement, some lust and much pain. Under the influence of this permanent buzzing shower bath of stimuli the surface tissue gradually loses its obtuseness and undergoes that strange transformation, that "burning through" process which finally gives rise to the elusive, first faint glow of consciousness. The grey matter of the brain-rind was originally skin tissue, exposed and brow-beaten, transformed by a unique organic metamorphosis. Even Freud, that giant of profanity, became almost lyrical where (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) he dealt with this aspect of the biology of the mind.

However, man developed a skull, in which his precious grey matter is safely packed like caviar in a box. No such casing is provided by society for its nervous tissues. They are rather treated like corns on the toes, a nuisance permanently trampled on and permanently hitting back with mean little stabs.

To return from metaphor to fact: the relation between intelligentsia and neurosis is not accidental, but functional. To think and behave independently puts one automatically into opposition against the majority whose thinking and behaviour is dependent on traditional patterns: and to belong to a minority is in itself a neurosis-forming situation. From the non-conformist to the crank there is only one step; and the hostile pressure of society provides the push.

When a man in a concert hall coughs, everybody will cough, and one feels the physical itching in one's throat. Group-mimicry is a

real force; to resist it means getting out of tune with one's social environment, creates neurotic tensions and feelings of guilt. One might in theory be a thousand times in the right, and yet feel guilty for butting against the accepted wrong, sanctioned by a tradition whose roots have sprouted in one's own unconscious self. To quarrel with society means to quarrel with its projections in one's self, and produces the classical neurotic split patterns. Oedipus situation and inferiority complex, timidity and arrogance, over-compensation and introversion are merely descriptive metaphors for various deformations with a common nomen: maladjustment. An intelligentsia deprived of the prop of an alliance with an ascending class must turn against itself and develop that hot-house atmosphere, that climate of intellectual masturbation and incest, which characterised it during the last decade.

And it must further develop that morbid attraction for the pseudo-intellectual hangers-on whose primary motive is not the "aspiration to independent thought" but neurosis pure and simple, and who crowd around the hot-house because the world outside is too cold for them. They infiltrate, and gradually outnumber the legitimate inhabitants, adding to their disrepute, until, in periods of decadence, the camp followers gradually swallow up the army. It is a sad transformation when social protest dissolves into a-social morbidity.

But even for the "real" intelligentsia, neurosis is an almost inevitable correlate. Take sex for example. On the one hand we know all about the anachronistic nature of our sex-regulating institutions, their thwarting influence, and the constant barrage of unhappiness they shower on society. On the other hand, individual experiments of "free companionship," marriages with mutual freedom, etc. etc., all end in pitiful failure; the very term, "free love," has already an embarrassingly Edwardian taint. Reasonable arrangements in an unreasonable society cannot succeed. The pressure of the environment (both from outside and from inside our conditioned selves) is enormous; under its distorting influence the natural becomes cramped, even in writing. You feel it even in such accomplished craftsmen as D. H. Lawrence and Hemingway. You hear, when the critical situation approaches, the author saying to himself: "Damn



it, it is an act of nature and I am going to put it as easily and naturally as if the two of them were having a meal." And then you watch him, the author, putting his sleeves up and setting himself to the task; sweat pours down his brow, his eyes pop out of his head, the nib of his pen breaks under the pressure of his desperate efforts to be "easy and natural about it." Hence the cramped dialect of Lady Chatterley's lover and that preposterous rabbit in the bag for which no bell would ever toll, in an otherwise masterly novel.

The pressure of the environment cramps art as it cramps behaviour. One may challenge this environment, but one has to pay for it, and the price is neurotic guilt. There never was an intelligentsia without a guilt-complex; it is the income tax one has to pay for wanting to make others richer. An armament manufacturer may have a perfectly clean conscience, but I have never met a pacifist without a guilty look in his eyes.

Those who attack the intelligentsia for its neurotic dispositions might as well attack the miners for their susceptibility to T.B. It is a professional disease and should be recognised as such, without scorn or shame.

## VI

### THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE FUTURE

The old, liberal and socialist intelligentsia of the Continent is no more; though we still fail to realise how thoroughly Nazism implemented its poet laureate's programme "When I hear the word culture I fire my pistol." A new intelligentsia may be growing underground, a new seed beneath the snow; but in spite of newspaper articles, intelligence-digests, radio, etc., we know at present as little about the mental climate of the people beyond the Channel, about how the past, present and future looks, smells, tastes to them, as we know about the planet Mars. Samples of literature which reach us from France do not seem to me very encouraging; but then, I am perhaps prejudiced against what I believe to be the growing French intellectual predilection for melodious bombast. Yet in Italy and the Balkans, in Austria and Norway, a process might already have



Officers, in the B.B.C., etc. For the time being "job" and "Private production" are still kept in separate compartments (with the result that the latter is becoming more and more atrophied); but it is imaginable that a situation may arise in which the two merge; when, instead of regarding the former as a kind of patriotic hacking and the latter as the real thing, the energies become suddenly canalised into one stream. A few may start the new mode, and the rest follow suit; the individuals concerned may believe that they are following a personal impulse, whereas in reality it would be a process of adaptation to the changed social situation of the managerial state. The danger of this happening is all the greater as conformity is often a form of betrayal which can be carried out with a perfectly clean conscience; and the temptation to exchange the miseries which intellectual honesty entails for the heart-warming satisfactions of managerial efficiency is great. The collapse of the revolutionary movement has put the intelligentsia into a defensive position; the alternative for the next few years is no more "capitalism or revolution" but to save *some* of the values of democracy and humanism or to lose them all; and to prevent this happening one has to cling more than ever to the ragged banner of "independent thinking."

It is not, at present, a very popular banner; and unique in this respect, that on its cloth the spittle of derision has clotted together with the blood of our dead.



defeated Republican militiamen. In those early days accommodation in Le Vernet consisted of trenches dug into the frozen earth, in which the wounded were allowed to die and the healthy to get sick. The first installations in the camp were the barbed wire around it and the cemetery next to it, where the first rows of wooden crosses all bear threefold Spanish names. There are no inscriptions, but one of them some José or Diego or Jesus had scratched into the wood with his pocket knife: "*Adios, Pedro. Los fascistas wanted to burn you alive but the French allowed you to freeze to death in peace. Pues viva la democracia.*"

Later a number of wooden huts were built, each to provide two hundred men with a living space of twenty-one inches in width; and when they were completed, the whole camp was evacuated because some inspecting commission found it uninhabitable for human beings. For a few months it stood empty except for the rats and bugs; then war broke out, and it was filled again with a strange crowd of men from all over Europe whom the French newspapers had graciously labelled the Scum of the Earth.

They were partly the last Mohicans of the International Brigades and partly politically active exiles from all countries under fascist rule. The French Sureté Nationale, which had never ceased to be an instrument of the Bonnet-Laval policy and which had Vichy all bottled and ready for sale since September, 1939, decided that the first thing to do in a war against Hitler was to lock up all the notorious anti-Hitlerites. To make this private anti-Left pogrom of the Sureté more palatable to the public, the "Scum" was given a fair sprinkling of about 20 per cent of genuine criminals, pimps, dope peddlers, nancy-boys and other types of the Montmartre underworld.

But the remaining 80 per cent of us, whom they had thrown on the dung heap, were those who had started the present war of our own as far back as 1930 and even earlier; who had drunk of Mussolini's castor oil and had lain on the torture racks of the Siguranza in Bucharest and sat on the Ghetto benches of Lvov and known the steel whips of the S.S. in Dachau; who had printed secret anti-Nazi leaflets in Vienna and Prague and, above all, had fought

through the prelude to the Apocalypse in Spain. Yes, I am rather proud of my old school tie of Le Vernet.

I was released in January, 1940, and though I have heard vague rumours of what happened there since, the first authentic report comes through this young Englishman who was brought into the camp five months after I left. As he still has relatives in France I shall call him by the assumed name of "Murdoch." He was arrested in Paris a few days after the German occupation, sent to a prisoners-of-war camp near Rheims, escaped, managed to get into non-occupied France, was arrested by Vichy gendarmes for crossing the demarcation line without permission and sent as a "suspect" to Vernet, where he arrived, complete with handcuffs, in the first days of July, 1940.

His narrative contains all the familiar features of a year's curriculum in Vernet. After three months his weight had gone down from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and twenty pounds. After six months he caught typhoid fever, but unlike those whose strength had been sapped by up to ten years of previous detentions, survived it. After twelve months he had reached a point where he thought that a short agony is better than a long one and embarked on a hunger-strike which after twenty days proved successful, thanks to the exceptional circumstances of his having a passport and a consul in Marseilles to raise a fuss about him. The characteristic of the ordinary member of the Scum is that he has no passport, no consul and nobody to care twopence for his existence.

Murdoch arrived in the camp just at the time when the first rumours about the terms of the Armistice treaty, and of the fatal nineteenth paragraph of the treaty, began to circulate. Paragraph nineteen provided for the extradition of any German-born subject the German authorities asked for—in other words, the handing over of anti-Nazi refugees to the Gestapo.

And yet when the terms of the Armistice were published there was no panic in the camp. The men got together and appealed to the Commander, asking him to let a few of the most exposed escape before the Germans got them. The Commander refused. As an officer he probably disliked the job he had to do; but after all he



had a salary of about ten pounds a month to lose. Next, a delegation of the prisoners asked that their files in the camp office should be destroyed before the Gestapo arrived. This the Commander promised; but when the first German commission arrived, the lists of prisoners were complete.

The first Nazi commission arrived at the camp sometime in July. And now the tragedy became a sinister farce. For two days before the visit there was, by the Commander's orders, a feverish activity of spit and polish going on. The straw was changed, the huts disinfected, the latrines cleaned. When the commission arrived the whole camp, except a dozen or so who had hanged themselves or cut their veins in time, were lined up for inspection on the parade ground. There they stood for hours, grouped by nationalities, all washed and brushed, with clean ears and finger-nails, in perfect military order, lambs waiting for the butcher. The commission consisted of sixteen smart German officers in various uniforms, including Gestapo and S.S. Correct and impersonal, like cattle-dealers taking stock, they reviewed the parade of their victims. The French gendarmes and officers accompanied them, beaming with smiles.

Surprisingly enough the Germans were in no hurry to get their pound of flesh. Altogether not more than about thirty of the politically most eminent refugees were taken away in small batches of three or five during the following months. Among them were Hans Dahlem and other members of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party, and Hans Schultz who had taken a leading part editing the famous "Brown Books on the Nazi Atrocities." He had been one of my dearest friends, and secretary to Willi Muenzenberg, propaganda chief of the West Bureau of the Communist International and perhaps the only match for Goebbels the Comintern ever produced. (Muenzenberg was found hanged in a forest near Grenoble during the days of the collapse; whether he was killed or committed suicide has never been established.)

Apart from the most prominent cases, the Nazis seemed to have lost interest in getting their refugees back. Probably they thought that these wretches could do no more harm, now that Europe was theirs. What they were after instead was human labour. The famous

A complicated and lengthy struggle followed, during which first the two barracks in question, and then half of the camp went on hunger strike. All this time the prisoners, with remarkable discipline, avoided any act of violence, refused to fall for any provocation, did not resist when the guards attacked them, and fought by the sole means of depriving themselves of food and of repeating for hours on end, with the monotony of a jungle tom-tom, their two slogans: "We are hungry" and "Respect our rights." The end of it was that the Commander collected about half a regiment of gendarmes from the neighbouring villages, who raided the camp without warning, assaulted the non-resisting crowd with their rifle butts and dragged away one hundred and six men, selected at random. These hundred and six were taken to the local gaol, beaten up all night and sent to prison. His prestige thus re-established, the Commander started negotiations with the prisoners' delegates which ended in the granting of practically all their claims. This victory of sheer will power was the more fantastic as the Commander of Le Vernet at that time was the same Squadron-Leader Pratz of the Garde Mobile who during the demonstrations on February 6, 1934, had ordered his men to fire into the crowd at the Place de la Concorde.

When Murdoch was freed, there were about two thousand men left in Vernet. Some Belgians, Swiss and Dutch had been repatriated, over one thousand had gone to slave for Germany under the Todt Commission, about eight hundred were deported to Africa; but new prisoners were brought in all the time. The majority of the newcomers were foreign volunteers who had fought through the Battle of France; some had been wounded, some decorated for conspicuous bravery. Now they paraded their Croix de Guerre on the famous latrine fatigues of Vernet. There were even two Chinamen there and an Abyssinian tribesman who had escaped from an Italian prison camp in 1935 and had since lived in Marseille until the police rounded him up as "suspect of anti-fascist activities." He died of tuberculosis in the hospital of Vernet.

As to genuine Fifth Columnists, only three or four are known to have dishonoured my old concentration camp by a short stay. Léon



soldierettes of propaganda posters. Talking of real people, we may distinguish two main categories: those who have personally experienced the Nazi-Fascist ways, and those who have not.

The first category—that is, the people on the European Continent—know exactly what they are up against; they know it as intimately as the sufferer knows his pains. But do they also know the remedy? Does the experience of pain provide you with the doctor's insight? The more you talk to people who have recently escaped from the dark Continent, the more you doubt it.

For the Czechs, Poles, Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutch, etc., this war is literally a fight for physical survival. They hate not the abstract term "fascism" but the concrete German who destroyed their homes and killed their friends. They fight not for the abstract term "democracy" but for the concrete aim of national liberation. If you talk to them of the United States of Europe they look askance at you. One of the main curses Hitler has brought on us is that, by trying to unify Europe in the wrong way, he has caused such a recrudescence of nationalistic, chauvinistic feeling, that the clock of European evolution has been put back for at least fifty years. Whether you like it or not, the wish-dream of the martyred Continent is a super-Versailles, and "national sovereignty" is the great slogan of the hour.

As to those who have had no personal experience of fascism—the common people in Anglo-Saxon countries—the term democracy has very little real meaning to them. They are as unaware of the basic constitutional liberties they enjoy as they are unaware of the composition of the air they breathe.

And this, if you reflect upon it, is perhaps the proudest achievement of the liberal era. Indeed, the ideal for a well-functioning democratic state is the same as for a gentleman's well-cut suit—it should not be noticed. For the common people of Britain, Gestapo and concentration camps have approximately the same degree of reality as the monster of Loch Ness. Atrocity propaganda is helpless against this healthy lack of imagination. I have tried my hand at it. Whenever I have lectured to the troops on fascist concentration camps I have had the distinct feeling that as long as I had a grip

patchwork, if it is achieved with good craftsmanship, may give Europe a breathing space of perhaps a couple of decades, with at least a chance of averting the next fatal plunge.

That means that we are beginning to realise that this war is not the final cataclysm, not the ultimate showdown between the forces of darkness and light, but perhaps only the beginning of a new series of convulsions, spread over a much larger period of history than we originally thought, until the new world is born. The task will be to use the coming breathing space as best we can. And, incidentally, to give praise every morning we awake without a Gestapo sentry under our window, for this nineteenth century postscript, our own physical survival. Who among those who lived through the French collapse two years ago believed in it? I for one did not.

#### IV

I am aware that this is a very modest credo for a member of what you call the "Left intelligentsia," and that my friends are going to throw stones and call me names. The more so as they too must feel, more or less consciously, that we have manoeuvred ourselves into a political vacuum—a vanguard cut off from its sources of supply.

We have thought of the Battle for Progress in the classical terms of Socialist trench warfare with neat, tidy front lines between the classes—and are caught in a perplexing fluid war of social movements with mobile units breaking loose from their social bodies: large sections of the working class joining the fascist ranks, radical wings of the younger Tory generation operating on the Left of the Trade Unions, bureaucracies and managers establishing themselves in vital hedgehog positions. And there we stand in no-man's land, dazzled knights in rusty armour, with a well-thumbed handbook of Marx-Engels quotations as our sole guide—the truest and profoundest social guide of the last century, but, alas! of modest use on this topsy-turvy battleground of today.

There is, however, a more encouraging aspect of this picture. For the last fifteen years those knights in rusty armour with Liberty, Equality, Fraternity written on their shields, have always fought on



## THE FRATERNITY OF PESSIMISTS\*

In this war we are fighting against a total lie in the name of a half-truth. This is a more modest formulation than those currently used, but if we tentatively accept it, the present will probably appear less confused and the future less depressing.

We call Nazism's New Order a total lie because it denies the specific ethos of our species, because by proclaiming that might is right it reduces Civil Law to Jungle Law, and by proclaiming that race is all it reduces Sociology to Zoology. With such a philosophy there can be no compromise; it must unconditionally surrender.

We, on the other hand, live in a climate of half-truths. We fight against Racialism and yet racial discrimination is far from abolished in the Anglo-Saxon countries; we fight for Democracy and yet our mightiest ally is a dictatorship where at least two of the four freedoms are not operating. But such is the sticky, all-pervading influence of our climate that even to mention these facts, undeniable though they are, has the effect of a provocation.

"So why rub it in?" some will probably say. "This is a battlefield, not a public confessional." The answer is that on both sides of the Atlantic people are getting more restive the nearer victory approaches. There is a strange mood of uneasiness everywhere—the hangover seems to precede the celebration.

After Dunkirk, at a time when America was still neutral and Russia still waiting for Hitler to open a second front in the East, many of us in this country felt that only a miracle could save us. Like a patient before a desperate operation, we thought: Lord, if I survive this I'll start a new life—and what a life it will be! Well, the miracle came, the operation succeeded and the patient was discharged from hospital—only to discover that his house is still in the slums, the letter-box still full of creditors' bills, his wife's voice still as strident and her eyes as squinting as before, and the awful child's

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nose still drips all day. Is he ungrateful to fate if the next morning he starts grumbling and swearing again?

Ever since the critical operation succeeded in North Africa, the bills kept coming in and the voices became more strident, the looks more squinting in the Allied family apartment. But sentimental appeals for more goodwill and co-operation between the competing partners who tomorrow will rule the world, are naïve and pointless. Governments have only a narrow margin for manoeuvring within the fatal automatism of the economic and social forces behind them. For at least fifty years it has become increasingly clear that only a vigorous international, i.e. "horizontal," organisation could end the global muddle by global solutions. In the first decades of this century, and particularly between the two wars, there was an immense hope that such a horizontal force would emerge and sweep away the vertical structures of competing national egotisms. Progressive people all over the world set their hopes on the League of Nations, the Second and Third International; and even the more conservative clung, consciously or unconsciously, to "horizontal" hopes such as the Vatican, some other Church or a masonic brotherhood.

*The outstanding feature of our days is the collapse of all horizontal structures.* That our truths are half-truths is a direct consequence of it. And unless we overcome our reluctance to chew, swallow and digest the bitter pill, we shall be able to see clearly neither where we stand, nor whither we drift.

Seen from the melancholy angle of a Continental (or rather of that bunch of homeless Leftists to whom I belong, and whom the Stalinists call Trotskyites, the Trotskyites call Imperialists, and the Imperialists call bloody Reds), the bankruptcy of Left horizontalism is becoming increasingly apparent. The corpse of the Comintern, in an advanced stage of decomposition, has at last been officially interred; Mr. Lewis' complicated game of stick-up chess with President Roosevelt was a memento of the state of affairs in the American Labour movement; in Russia the wheel is coming back full circle to the traditional values of the Fatherland, the Cadet Schools and the Orthodox Church; the British Labour Party



grow, and if at the time of their maturity they don't attain fulfilment by seizing power, they decline and wither away. That is what happened to the horizontal movements in this century. The League of Nations died of consumption, the official Churches are politically paralysed, the Second International developed arteriosclerosis, the Third decayed. The only survivors of the age of the ascending power of the workers are the Trade Unions. I am far from under-rating their enormous importance and the positive function they fulfil. But they are an economic safeguard, not a creative political force.

The failure of "horizontalism" in our time is more than a momentary set-back; it reveals the inadequacy of a method of approach which dominated the Liberal and Socialist movements for the last century. To talk of "ups and downs" is self-deception; we are not on a mountain railway but in a blind alley. Today we are farther than twenty years ago from the realisation of a truly new human climate, from thinking, feeling, acting in intercontinental terms adequate to the speed of communications. All our post-war planning has the character of designing makeshift bridges from one vertical power-centre to the other; they are half-honest, half-earnest attempts to get somehow over the next decade or two which, everybody vaguely feels, will not be an era of long-term solutions but an intermediate, transitory period, an *interregnum* of half-truths and twilight, fraught with the danger that the bridges may crack and the fatal mechanism may push the vertical giants once more on their blind march of destruction.

So far this is a pessimistic picture, but based, I believe, on objective facts. What follows is a purely subjective assessment of future trends, which some will say is crankish. But I know that many others have the same vague feelings in their bones; I am talking to those others.

Interregnums—i.e., periods of transitory chaos which follow the collapse of the traditional values of a civilisation—are of limited duration. I believe that the day is not far when the present interregnum will end, and a new "horizontal" ferment will arise—not a



new party or sect, but an irresistible global mood, a spiritual spring-tide like early Christianity or the Renaissance. It will probably mark the end of our historical era, the period which began with Galileo, Newton and Columbus, the period of human adolescence, the age of scientific formulations and quantitative measurements, of utility values, of the ascendancy of reason over spirit. Its achievements were gigantic; the spasms of its death struggle are terrifying. But they can't last much longer; as the frequency of the convulsions increases, the amplitude of their violence grows; the point of exhaustion has come within almost measurable range. There might be one or two more world wars but not a dozen; it is a question of decades, not of centuries.

What will the new age after the interregnum be like? One thing is certain: it will not be the Brave New World with which Huxley frightened us. It is Hitler's historic merit that he immunised us against Totalitarian utopias, as a dose of cholera vaccine immunizes against cholera. I do not mean that similar attempts will not be made in other parts of the world during the remaining decades of the interregnum. But they will be mere episodes, symptoms of the agony of the dying age.

The clue to the values of the coming new global mood is provided by historical analogy. We can discern in the past a succession of levels of social awareness, like an ascending staircase. The age of religious wars ended when secular politics began to dominate human consciousness; feudal politics ended when economic factors assumed overriding importance; the struggles of Economic Man will end by the emergence of the new ethical values of the new age. The great disputes are never settled on their own level, but on the next higher one. The Second and Third Internationals got into the blind alley because they fought capitalism in its own terms of reference, and were unable to ascend to that spiritual climate the longing for which we feel in our bones.

Seen from the perspective of the next-higher historical level, the old controversies lose interest, appear drained of their meaning; and conversely, the exact properties of the succeeding period cannot be formulated from the lower level. Such attempts lead to mystic

dilettantism, like Heard's Yogi journalese. All we can say is that the new movement will re-establish the disturbed balance between rational and spiritual values, or, in Auden's words, *rally the lost and trembling forces of the will—Gather them up and let them loose upon the earth*. But as yet we live in the interregnum.

Those who are basically optimists can afford to face facts and to be pessimistic in their short-term predictions; only basic pessimists need the dope of the half-truth. The interregnum of the next decades will be a time of distress and of gnashing of teeth. We shall live in the hollow of the historical wave. Does this mean that we should lie low and wait fatalistically until the time is ripe?

I believe the contrary. What we need is an active fraternity of pessimists (I mean short-term pessimists). They will not aim at immediate radical solutions, because they know that these cannot be achieved in the hollow of the wave; they will not brandish the surgeon's knife at the social body, because they know that their own instruments are polluted. They will watch, with open eyes and without sectarian blinkers, for the first signs of the new horizontal movement; when it comes, they will assist its birth; but if it does not come in their lifetime, they will not despair. They will not necessarily expect the new movement to arise from this or that section of the working or professional classes; but certainly from the ranks of the poor, from those who have suffered most. And meanwhile their chief aim will be to create oases in the interregnum desert.

Oases may be small or big. They may consist of only a few friends as in Silone's great book *The Seed Beneath the Snow*; or they may embrace whole countries—the countries situated on the periphery of the great fields of force, for instance, Italy, Norway, Spain. It is quite possible that in the coming world of bellicose managerial giant-States of the Burnham pattern such marginal oases survive; that, although submitting to the general social-economic trend, they will be able to afford a greater amount of tolerance and old-fashioned humaneness than the main competitors; Switzerland during the last three hundred years is an obvious example. And it may further be possible to create enclaves, and to a certain extent



to influence the climate, within the competing giant-States themselves. During an earlier interregnum, in the so-called dark ages between the decline of Rome and the dawn of the Renaissance, such oases assured the continuity of civilisation: the monasteries first, and later the Universities with their more or less extra-territorial Alma Mater on which no gendarme could set boot.

Among the great Powers, Britain, thanks to the obstinacy of her traditions and the great inertia of her body social, is probably the most capable of developing an oasis-climate. Interregnums are downward slopes of history; and at this point of our journey the brakes of the train are more important than the engine. During the last century our ethical brakes were more and more neglected, until totalitarian dynamism made the engine run amok. In plain language, that means that if I have to choose between living under a Political Commissar or a Blimp, I unhesitatingly choose Blimp. He will treat me as an annoying kind of oddity and push me about from sheer lack of imagination; the imaginative Commissar will politely shoot me because I disagree with him. In other historical situations, on the upward grade, Blimp might again become the main enemy of progress. For the next decades, his muddled decency and clinging to traditional values (even if it is partly pretence) will be a great asset, to mollify the impact.

In 1917 Utopia seemed at hand. Today it is postponed for the duration of the interregnum. Let us build oases . . .



tives in a French or Belgian village? Those people who stretch out their hands for a bar of chocolate or throw flowers at the turret, are each one of them a century older than the boys inside. You see it in their eyes, even if they smile. You see it even on the young girl who kisses the driver. They are the Haves of experience. And that conscious minority among them on whom our hopes are based are not isolated individuals sprung from the intelligentsia, but men of action and sensitivity who sprang mainly from the resistance movements. Their number is much greater in proportion, their ties with the masses are more human and intimate, and their chance to be heard is better, even if that takes some time. For the broad inert masses themselves have not only been fanaticised but also sensitised; that is what makes the people on the photographs look older and more mature than the boys in the turret.

"Souffrir passe; avoir souffert ne passe jamais." This residue of their sufferings will remain, even if it finds no immediate political expression, even if it remains for some time an under-current waiting for the chance to break through the chaotic surface. They may commit follies and mistakes, but these will not be quite the same mistakes as before. And perhaps they will not even be their own mistakes, but imposed upon them from outside: false polarisations and national splits which merely reflect latent conflicts between the great Powers competing for zones of influence. After all, if the Poles had acquired all the wisdom of this earth, their fate would still have been much the same. Thus if you hear about the quarrels among Greek partisans or French maquisards, don't say smugly: These people are the same fools they were before, their sufferings haven't changed them. The change is there and will bear its fruit in time—if power-politics gives them a chance. And if this chance is denied them as it has been in the past, they have at least an excuse for going temporarily mad.

But you have no such excuse. You are not sandwiched in between big neighbours who decide your fate either by bullying or by washing their hands of you. A Venezuelan invasion of the States is rather unlikely for the next few hundred years. Nor will the Canadian government finance a movement in your midst to pose as a national



reaction to a given situation: the "thalamic" and the "cortical" type of behaviour. Thalamic behaviour is dominated by emotion, cortical behaviour by formal reasoning. Irrational beliefs are rooted in emotion; they are *felt* to be true. Believing may be defined as "knowing with one's viscera." Behaviour under thalamic domination is accompanied by affective, that is, wishful or fearful thinking; the type of thinking we find in monkeys, savages and infants; and in twenty-three out of twenty-four hours in ourselves. Cortical, i.e., detached rational thought, is a new and fragile acquisition which breaks down at the slightest irritation of the viscera, reported by the autonomous system to the thalamus, which, once aroused, dominates the scene.

Both anthropology and psychology have during the last fifty years led to convergent results. Levy-Bruehl proved that the mentality of the primitives is pre-logical; the Kantian categories of (homogenous) space, time and causality do not exist in the primitive mind; it is controlled not by formal reasoning but by ready-made beliefs (*pré-liaisons collectives*). Freud demonstrated the affective roots of thought and followed them down to Totem and Tabu; Jung showed that certain archaic or archetypal images and beliefs are the collective property of our race. Even modern philology came more or less independently to the same results; Ogden and Richards proved the emotional fetish-character of words and tautological statements. Science has at last reached a stage sufficiently rational to be able to see the irrationality of the mind's normal functioning.

The science which has so far been least affected by these developments is politics. The ultimate reason for the failure of the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals and of international socialism in general is their disregard of the irrational factor in the human mind. Socialist doctrine and Leftist propaganda remain based on the assumption that man is an entirely rational being who only needs convincing by logical arguments, evening classes, pamphlets, Penguins, etc., to recognise his own interests and to act accordingly. The subconscious, the older half of the brain, the archetypes, the world of the dream, the ductless glands, the autonomous nervous system, the id—that is, 90 per cent of what constitutes the real *homo*

*sapiens*—was left out of the picture. Hence the total failure of the Left to analyse, explain and counter-act the phenomenon of Fascism. Hence its self-deceiving, shallow optimism even on the present verge of the abyss.\*

## II

This basic shortcoming of the Left cannot be explained by individual shortcomings of their leaders. Its roots lie much deeper.

Up to the end of the eighteenth century, revolutionary movements had either a religious basis, or at least strong religious ties. They satisfied both the rational desire for a better life and the irrational craving for an Absolute. In other words, they were emotionally saturated movements. The French Revolution brought a radical change.

The Reformation had attacked the corrupt papist clergy in the name of God; its secular struggle had left deity intact. The French Revolution was a frontal attack not only against the clergy but against God. Robespierre's attempt to provide a synthetic substitute in the "Goddess of Reason" proved a failure. Fortunately, however, other Absolutes substituted themselves: Liberté Égalité Fraternité was not a mere slogan but a fetish; so were the Tricolor and the Phrygian cap. Roman tradition—Consuls, Patriots, the new calendar, etc.—provided the mythology of the new cult. The Church as a secular vehicle of deity was superseded by *la patrie* as an instrument for the spreading of the new gospel of the Rights of Man. The American Declaration of Independence contains the words: "We

\* Fascism, on the other hand, despite its emphasis on the irrational and the myth, is no nearer to scientific truth. It errs on the other side; the rational element is underplayed, its sociology is based on an untenable race-theory, its political economy is rudimentary and eclectic, its society static.

The only scientific attempt at a synthesis between the Marxian approach to history on the one hand and the "neo-Machiavellian school"—Michel, Pareto, Sorel, Mosca—to which Fascism is the heir, on the other, was made by Burnham; and he was promptly stoned by the Left. Burnham's conclusions are often sweeping and it is easy to criticize him in detail; but the originality of his approach and its immensely stimulating character come at once into relief if one contrasts the *Managerial Revolution* or *The Machiavellians* with, say, Professor Laski's *Reflections on the Revolution in Our Time*. They compare as an aphrodisiac with an aspirin tablet.



hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, . . ." The emphasis is on "self-evident"; it is the operative word for axiomatic belief, for a Revelation beyond the reach of logical reasoning.

But the direct emotional appeal of the new deities was of short duration; it wore off in less than a century as compared with almost two millennia of the Christian myth. The reasons are obvious. The myths and rites of Christianity had a continuous ancestry back through Judea, Sumeria, Babylon, to neolithic man, to magic and animism. Its roots were in the deepest archetypal layers of the unconscious. But the tenets of 1789 were a product of conscious reasoning. For a short time they were capable of filling the sudden vacuum, of serving as idols *faute de mieux*. But they were not capable of personification, they could not serve as a projecting screen for man's craving for the Absolute. They could not provide mystic compensation for his feelings of cosmic inadequacy and frustration, for his archaic fears. They had no thalamic roots, they were secular and synthetic ersatz-deities. Gods reside in clouds and twilight; the "mystique" of the Left, as the French call it, was born in the sharp clarity of the Age of Enlightenment.

About the middle of the nineteenth century, after 1848, the new Creed had lost its religious fetish character. The epigones of the French Revolution—Proudhon, Fourier, Saint-Simon—were not prophets but cranks. There was no movement with an irresistible emotional appeal to take over the heritage of declining Christianity.

The founders of modern socialism thought that an appeal of this kind had become unnecessary. Religion was opium for the people and was to be replaced by a rational diet. The rapid advance of all sciences, with Darwinism making the pace, created a general optimistic belief in the infallibility of reasoning, in a clear, bright, crystalline world with a transparent atomic structure, with no room for shadows, twilights and myths. In this atmosphere was Marxian scientific socialism born; in a period when the relations between rational and affective behaviour were looked upon much as the relation between rider and horse; the rider representing rational thought, the horse what was then called the "dark instincts" and



ing up. At the time when British Labour and German Social-Democrats came to power, all vitality had already run out of them. The communications with the unconscious layers were cut; their ethos was based on purely rational concepts; the only reminder of French revolutionary tradition was the caustic Voltairian tone of their polemics.

At a Communist writers' Congress, after hours of speeches about the brave new world in construction, André Malraux asked impatiently: "And what about the man who is run over by a tram-car?" He met blank stares and did not insist. But there is a voice inside all of us which does insist. We have been cut off from the belief in personal survival, in the immortality of a self which we love and hate more intimately than anything else, and the scar of that amputation has never healed. To be killed on a barricade, or to die as a martyr of science provides some compensation; but what about that man who is run over by the tram-car, or the child who is drowned? Gothic man had an answer to this question. The apparently accidental was part of a higher design. Fate was not blind; storms, volcanoes, floods and pests all conformed to a subtle pattern; you were looked after in higher quarters. Cannibals, Eskimos, Hindus and Christians—all have an answer to this question of all questions which, however repressed, pooh-poohed, shamefully hidden, still remains the last decisive regulator of our actions. But the only answer which Malraux, after a painful silence, received was:

"In a perfect socialist transport system, there would be no accidents."

### III

After World War I the accumulated frustration exploded. The neglected craving for Faith, for something absolute and unquestionable to believe in, swept over Europe. It was the Return of the Repressed; the cortex had had its say and failed, the thalamus took its revenge. The electrical storm discharged itself in different forms according to different local conditions. In some countries it was delayed by the soothing effects of victory; in some it blew over in a hedonistic wave, an orgy-porgy of Jazz and copulation. The his-

torically relevant phenomena in which the return to Faith crystallised were two: Fascism and the Soviet myth.

I should emphasize at once that by "Soviet myth" I do not mean the developments in the Soviet Union, but their psychological reflection in the European Left. I shall try to prove that, like all genuine myths, it responded to certain deep and unconscious cravings, almost independently of the historical reality which it was supposed to reflect; just as the Christian myth remains unaffected by any historical discoveries about the real personality of Jesus of Nazareth and his intimates.

### IV

Both the Fascist and the Soviet myths were not synthetic constructions, but revivals of archetypes, and therefore both capable of absorbing not only the cerebral component but the total man; both provided emotional saturation.

The fascist myth is undisguised and explicit. The opium is doled out by the leaders to the masses quite openly. The archetypes of Blood and Soil, of the dragon-slaying Superman, the deities of Valhalla and the satanic powers of the Jews are systematically called up for national service. One half of Hitler's genius consisted in hitting the right unconscious chords. The other half was his alert eclecticism, his flair for hyper-modern *avant-garde* methods in Economy, Architecture, Technique, Propaganda and Warfare. The secret of Fascism is the revival of archaic beliefs in an ultra-modern setting. The Nazi edifice was a skyscraper fitted with hot water pipes which drew on underground springs of volcanic origin.

On the other hand, the water supply of the socialist movement consisted of a cistern on the roof which it was hoped would one day fill with rain. The Russian revolution brought not only rain but a tropical cloud-burst. Suddenly the hitherto dry taps began to gush and spout.

During the first few years Soviet myth and Russian reality were fairly congruent. It was the heroic age in which legends are generated. Behind the smoke there was a real fire.

And what a fire! The People had seized the power and had main-



test were expelled, killed, or denounced to the police. The Byzantine structure of the Comintern reflected the structure of the Soviet dictatorship; the Communist approach to the workers and the intelligentsia of Europe was modelled on the Russian way of handling a semi-Asiatic and practically illiterate population, and applied with total disregard of Western conditions and mentality. All this has been expounded in detail by critics of the Comintern from Trotsky to Borkenau. But their analysis is confined to the political plane; the psychological reasons why the majority of Communists and fellow-travellers outside Russia accepted this state of affairs remain to be explained.

Constant purges, the monotonously recurrent excommunication of the popular leaders of yesterday, the absence of any rank and file influence on the Party line, the sacrifice of thousands in hopeless adventures alternating with capitulations to and alliances with the enemy; the twisting around of slogans to mean the exact opposite of what the words conveyed, indignant denials of the truth of yesterday, an atmosphere of slander, denunciations and Byzantine worship—how can it be explained that millions in the West swallowed all this, and swallowed it voluntarily, in self-imposed discipline, with no Gestapo or G.P.U. to back it up?

Such unconditional surrender of the critical faculties always indicates the presence of a factor which is *a priori* beyond the reach of reasoning. One might be tempted to call it a neurotic complex but for the fact that the true Believer (whether in the Christian or the Soviet myth) is, as a rule, happier and more balanced than the atheist or the Trotskyite. Deep-rooted, archetypal beliefs lead only to neurosis when doubt provokes a conflict. To keep doubt away, a system of elastic defences is established. The outer defences are provided by the Catholic Index, the banning of "Trotskyite" literature, avoidance of contacts with heretics and suspects. They produce a characteristic sectarian intolerance, which coming as it often does from otherwise good-natured people, manifests itself in surprisingly violent forms.

The inner defences are unconscious. They consist in a kind of magic aura which the mind builds around its cherished belief.



solid and untouchable core to it, a magic formula which amounted to something like: "In spite of all, Russia is 'the real thing'; 'the only pointer to the future'; 'the last hope';" and so on. Even frightened stockbrokers and enlightened business men discover in times of depression that "after all there may be something in it"—much like the atheist on his death-bed taking the Last Sacrament.

Though vaguer and woollier, this belief is as unconsciously and jealously guarded as the doctrine of the orthodox. The *New Statesman* and *Nation's* interpretations of Stalinite policy display all the ingeniousness of the official Apologist, though with a somewhat more elegant logical curvature. The sympathiser enjoys the apparent superiority of the broad-minded Theist over the doctrinaire Catholic; but the roots of one belief are as irrational as the others.

## IX

The attempt to break down the addict's defences by bringing these irrational roots into his consciousness is practically hopeless. As with all firmly embedded beliefs, the unconscious resistance against this operation which threatens its very fundamentals, is enormous. This resistance itself is rationalised in the Communist rejection of "bourgeois psychology" as a "diversion from the class-struggle"; psycho-analysis is officially banned in Soviet Russia. Communist psychology is based on the hypothetical notion of a "class-consciousness" which is supposed to reflect a person's position in the process of Production, and which has never been demonstrated by a psychologist on a living individual. Thus an axiomatic belief is defended by the equally axiomatic rejection of the means to analyse it; a process familiar both to psycho-therapists and to historians of the Church.

And as in the case of the Church, the process of weaning is dependent on two factors: the gradual attrition caused by the ever-widening gulf between reality and myth; and the emergence of a new creed of equal emotional power and in better harmony with reality.

## SOVIET MYTH AND REALITY

### I

The previous essay dealt with the psychological aspects of the Soviet myth. The subject of the present essay is Soviet reality. Its aim is to investigate, within the limits of available space and information, the question whether the Soviet system is socialistic (in fact or tendency), or whether it is not.

Such an inquiry has to work its way through a series of obstacles which surround the truth in concentric rings. The outer defence consists in a deafening propaganda-barrage concentrated on some topical subject—a polar expedition, stratosphere flight, or the building of the Moscow underground—which in itself has no bearing on the question of socialism but creates the impression that it has. The latest of these propaganda-barrages may be summarised as follows:

1. The Soviet people, and particularly the defenders of Stalingrad, defeated the Germans because they "knew what they were fighting for"; the Russian victories prove the excellence of the Stalinite system and give the lie to its critics.

If this kind of topical argument is found to be too superficial to withstand serious inquiry, the inner defences come into action. They are:

2. *Camouflage or denial of facts* (which are sometimes later admitted), e.g., the famine of 1932-33.

3. *The doctrine of "esoteric" and "exoteric" truth.* Official statements which sound too fantastic to the Western mind are justified as being aimed at home consumption only, with a reference to the backwardness of the Russian masses. E.g.: Zinoviev an agent of the British Intelligence Service.

4. *Distinction between socialist strategy and tactics.* All reactionary measures of the Soviet regime are justified as "temporary expedients." E.g.: capital punishment for strikers.



5. *The End justifies the Means.* Means which are damnable if employed by a capitalist state, automatically become commendable if they serve the cause of the Soviet state. E.g.: Stalin-Hitler pact.

6. *The doctrine of the unshaken foundations.* This is the last line of defence of the sophisticated apologist. It is also the tie which links dissenters—Trotskyites, Socialists, critical fellow-travellers—to the Soviet myth. Weaknesses, failures, even crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy are admitted but claimed to be mere surface symptoms which do not affect the fundamentally progressive nature of the Soviet Union, guaranteed by the nationalisation of the means of production and the abolition of the profit-motive. It is argued that as long as these foundations survive, Russia is still to be regarded as a socialist country and hence the special concern of the Left all over the world.

Though the line of Soviet Apologetics is subject to frequent changes, the particular arguments used can always be reduced to one of the six headings above. We now have to examine these in greater detail.

## II

Owing to peculiarities of wartime psychology, Argument No. 1, though logically the weakest, is emotionally the most powerful, and not only among political illiterates. The success of the Red Army released an irresistible wave of enthusiasm for Russia among the common people of Europe, and cowed its critics into uneasy silence.

It would be absurd to belittle the fighting quality of the Russians or the efficiency of the Soviet war machinery. The defeat of the German army was an historic performance of the first magnitude, though by no means a miracle. The population of Soviet Russia is more than twice that of Germany; her industrial potential in 1939 was, according to Soviet statistics, equal to Germany's; her enormous arid spaces and her climate are invaluable assets against any invader. Thus *a priori* there was no earthly reason why the Russians should be defeated by the Germans, even if we leave the British Empire and the United States completely out of the picture.

The endurance and fatalism of the Russian soldier are proverbial.

alone, all we can say is that if she is a socialist country, this fact has been carefully hidden both from the outside world and from her own soldiers and citizens.

### III

Denial of facts about Soviet reality may be conscious or unconscious. If it is conscious, it falls under the next heading. But mostly it is unconscious, based on ignorance.

Ignorance of Soviet reality among the addicts of the Soviet myth is stupendous. Nine out of ten are shocked and incredulous when told, for instance, that the workers' right to strike is abolished in Russia, and that striking, or the incitement to it, is punishable by capital punishment; or that the Soviet electorate's only function is to vote "yes" or "no" to a single list of officially appointed candidates. This ignorance is partly due to the difficulty of obtaining factual information, partly to an unconscious fear of disappointment. One could almost say that the more importance people attach to Russia the more reluctant they seem to find out the facts. To believe entails no desire to know; everybody reads the Bible but who reads Flavius Josephus?

Given the Left's unconscious willingness to be deceived, Soviet propaganda could achieve feats unparalleled in history. Their achievements were mainly based on two methods: (a) the indirect method of suppression of facts, and (b) direct methods of propaganda. We shall treat the two separately.

#### SUPPRESSION OF FACTS

Foreign newspapers were and are forbidden in Russia. The Soviet press is controlled to a degree which Nazism could never achieve. Each town in the Union, Moscow included, has two morning papers: a government organ and a party organ. All government papers throughout the country appear every morning with one uniform leader, distributed by radio and telegraph: the leader of the Moscow *Ivestia*. Party papers all over the country appear with the leader from the Moscow *Pravda*. Both foreign and home



reached, about competitions between factory shock brigades, awards of the Red Banner, new giant combines in the Urals, and so on; the photographs were either of young people, always laughing and always carrying a banner in their hands, or of some picturesque elder in Uzbekistan, always smiling and always learning the alphabet. Not one word about the local famine, epidemics, the dying out of whole villages; even the fact that there was no electricity in Kharkov was not once mentioned in the Kharkov newspaper. It gave one a feeling of dreamlike unreality; the paper seemed to talk about some quite different country which had no point of contact with the daily life we led; and the same applies to the radio.

The consequence of all this was that the vast majority of people in Moscow had no idea of what went on in Kharkov, and even less of what went on in Tashkent, or Archangel or Vladivostok—twelve days' train journey away, in a country where travelling was reserved for government officials; and these travellers were not of a talkative nature. The enormous land was covered by a blanket of silence and nobody outside the small circle of initiated could form a comprehensive picture of the situation.

A second belt of silence isolated the country from contacts with the outside world. Foreign missions and newspaper correspondents were concentrated in Moscow. The capital had priority in everything, from food and fuel to industrial goods, toothbrushes, lipsticks, contraceptives and other luxuries unknown in the rest of the country; its living standard was entirely unrepresentative. If the average citizen of Moscow was to a large extent ignorant of what was going on in remoter parts of his own country, the foreigner's ignorance was unbounded. He could only travel chaperoned by Security officials performing the various functions of interpreters, guides, car drivers, chance acquaintances and even amorous conquests. His contacts were restricted to Soviet officials; to the ordinary Soviet citizen social intercourse with foreigners meant running the risk of being accused of espionage or treason. In addition to the difficulty of obtaining factual information, the foreign correspondent was faced with the problem of passing it on. To smuggle out news vetoed by the censor meant expulsion; a risk which both

by Lunacharsky, former People's Commissar for Education. It was a film for home consumption, a category sharply distinguished from the early masterpieces designed for propaganda abroad.

I remember with equal vividness another episode. A popular Ukrainian writer asked me for advice: he was writing a short story with the action in London and had got stuck on a scene in which a worker, walking through the streets on a Sunday morning, was pushed off the pavement by a policeman. What would the policeman say, what colloquialism or curse would he use?

"The question is," I said, "why does the policeman push him off?"

"Why," said the Ukrainian colleague, "I told you he is a workman. He wears no collar or tie."

He was honestly convinced that in capitalist London policemen would walk about on Sunday mornings pushing proletarians off the pavement. And he was not illiterate, but a young man educated in a Soviet university and with a growing literary reputation. The Russian's idea of Capitalism was the counterpart of the *Daily Worker's* reader's idea of Bolshevism.

The same black-and-white technique was applied to the inner Russian opposition. The dictatorial regime, committed to its own infallibility, could not afford to let the masses realise that in political matters there was scope for different opinions within the same camp. Hence the accused in the Moscow trials had to belong to the "black" side; they could not appear as bona fide politicians at variance with the government, but had to play the rôle of counter-revolutionary agents of foreign powers who had acted not out of conviction but for pay and some undefined satanic motives.

The victims lent themselves to this game for reasons which varied according to their personality. Men like Bukharin who shared the accusers' philosophy acted their rôle voluntarily in the conviction that this was the last service they could render to the Party after they had been politically defeated and had, according to the all-encompassing law of totalitarian politics, forsaken their lives. Others, worn out by a life-long struggle, hoped to save if not their own, at least the lives of their families held as hostages (cf., Kamenev



In other words, a division of labour was achieved which has for decades been a matter of course in the rationalised mining industry of the West—which however meant the end of the old-fashioned and comfortable methods of work from which the Russian miner was loath to part, and which had to be forced upon him under the naïvely romantic guise of Stakhanovism.

Rationalisation *as such* was of course inevitable—just as differentiation of income *as such* was inevitable. But just as inequality of income was carried beyond capitalistic standards, so the hardships for the workers entailed by rationalisation were driven ruthlessly beyond any reasonable limit by disguising a sober necessity as a socialist imperative:

“The Stakhanovite movement is something specifically Soviet, something specifically Socialist,” the Commissar for Heavy Industry, Ordshonikidse, assured the Stakhanovite Conference.\* And Molotov explained: “. . . it is not a question . . . of overstrain. . . . Counting minutes and seconds during one’s work means introducing a rhythm . . . means introducing culture in one’s work. It is therefore not a question of *overstrain* on the part of the worker but of a *cultured* attitude towards work.”\* (Molotov’s emphasis.)

Culture in this new interpretation made rapid progress in Soviet industry. “Stakhanovites”—that is, team leaders, and foremen in capitalist terminology—had separate dining rooms in factories and were paid up to twenty times the average. To take an example; according to the Moscow paper *Trud* (20/1/1936) sixty employees of a Donetz mine earned monthly wages of 1,000–2,500 roubles per head; seventy-five employees earned 800–1,000 roubles per head; four hundred earned 500–800 roubles per head and the remaining thousand *averaged* 125 roubles. The top wages in this average mine were about thirty times higher than the minimum wages. But the director of a mine of 1,500 employees belongs only to the medium stratum of the technocracy; the salaries of directors, chief engineers and administrators in the top stratum are up to 100 times higher

\* *Labour in the Land of Socialism: Stakhanovites in Conference*, Moscow, 1936.

Neither of these two motives can justify the carrying of the remedy to the excesses described. But even more serious for a historic evaluation of the Soviet experiment is the fact itself that the incentives which form the basis of socialist theory have broken down. I shall try to draw the conclusions later on.

## IX

### ASPECTS OF SOVIET LEGISLATION

After the devastations of the civil war and the famine, tens of thousands of children had become tramps, members of juvenile criminal gangs, a plague to the citizen and a thorny social problem to the regime. The official term for them was "Besprizorni"—Waifs and Strays.

The Besprizorni played during the 'twenties an important role in Soviet propaganda abroad. The aims of this propaganda were twofold: to evoke sympathy with the terrible sufferings of the Russian people, and admiration for the modern pedagogical methods of tackling the problem. One of the most admirable of the great Soviet films of that period was Ekk's "The Road to Life." It showed the rehabilitation of a gang of hardened juvenile criminals under strict avoidance of coercion, authority and punishment, by methods of occupational therapy, persuasion and communal life. The film, which had a triumphant success all over the world, symbolised the socialist attitude to criminology, based on environmental psychology. The concepts of punishment, retribution and intimidation had been discarded and replaced by measures of social protection and social therapy. These indeed were fundamental principles of early Soviet legislation, and cornerstones of socialist philosophy. If they are taken away, the whole system collapses. For if the social defaulter, warped by his environment, cannot be reformed by changing that environment, then there can be no hope of reforming our warped society by any change of political institutions. In that case the Conservatives are right, human nature is unchangeable, and will never be capable of developing such unselfish and responsible traits as are required for a socialist society. These are elementary tenets of



Another law, equally unprecedented in the legislation of any country, decrees the deportation for five years "to the remote regions of Siberia" of all the dependents of a man who escapes military service by deserting abroad, *if they did not know about his crime*. If they did know about it, the penalty is five to ten years of imprisonment and confiscation of property. Paragraph 3 of the decree of June 8, 1934 (published in *Izvestia*, June 9, 1934), runs:

3. In the event of flight or escape abroad of a military person, the adult members of his family, if they have in any way assisted the preparations or the commitment of the act of treason, or even if they have known about it without bringing it to the knowledge of the authorities, will be punished with 5 to 10 years of imprisonment with confiscation of their property.

The other adult members of the traitor's family, living with him or being his dependents at the time of treason, are deprived of their electoral rights and deported for 5 years to the remote regions of Siberia.

The decree revives the primitive conception of the collective responsibility of the family or clan for crimes. Since 1935 the routine of deporting relatives of arrested people has been extended to all forms of high treason and counter-revolutionary activity—terms which cover practically any offence: political dissent, "wrecking," absenteeism. What it amounts to in practice is that every individual has to regard his whole family as potential hostages for his conduct. Hence the current practice on the part of women whose husbands have been arrested to rush to the registrar and obtain divorce by unilateral declaration; a measure regarded as a mere formality which does not affect the personal relationship between those concerned.\*

Commenting on the new terror-decrees, the People's Commissar for Justice, Krylenko, explained: (*Izvestia*, No. 37, 12/2/1936):

In the opinion of Liberals and of opportunists of all kinds . . . the stronger a country is, the more lenient it can be towards its opponents. No, and again no! The stronger the country is, the mightier it is, the stronger the ties which unite Party and Government with the toiling

\* This possibility is now barred by the new divorce laws of 1944.

masses . . . and the greater our indignation and revolt against those who disturb our socialist construction and the more justified are we to take stern measures against them.

By that time any pretence of socialist principles in Judicature had been dropped. The new Soviet Textbook of Law restored the term "punishment" for "measure of social defence," and retribution, intimidation and the spreading of fear became its officially avowed aims. The victims of the purges, high and humble, were no more called "social defaulters" but "mad dogs, rats, vermin, hyenas, dung and scum." For if the criminal was a product of his environment as Marx taught, what sort of environment was it which turned the whole old bolshevik guard into traitors and mad dogs? It was an awkward question to answer, but a question which automatically cropped up in every Marxistically trained mind. To avoid it was only possible by discarding the very foundations of socialist thought.

This tendency permeates the new laws and decrees regulating every aspect of public and private life: marriage, divorce, sexual relations, travel, religion and military training. I shall touch upon only a few aspects of them.

Both socialists and communists on the Continent had fought ardent campaigns against laws in capitalist countries penalising homosexuality and making abortion a crime. The arguments about homosexuality are too well known to need repetition. If it is a crime, half the writers, painters and musicians from Plato through Leonardo to Proust and Gide would have had to spend their lives in gaol. As to abortion the socialist argument can be shortly summarised as follows: The average woman if unwilling to have a child will practice birth-control. If a woman has decided to undergo an abortion she must have serious reasons of a psychological or economic nature. In *both* cases it is socially preferable that the unwanted child should not be born. If a woman is determined to get rid of her pregnancy she will attempt it regardless of the law. (In the Weimar Republic the average yearly number of hospital admissions after illegal abortion attempts was over 500,000—and this figure only comprises cases where hospitalisation became neces-



sary!) Hence the only practical effect of outlawing abortion is that the rich have their illegal operations performed in relative hygiene and comfort, whereas the poor are driven into the squalor and dangers of self-damaging manipulations and quacks.

The decree banning abortions was the only law in the history of the Soviet Union which was submitted to public discussion before its promulgation. A plebiscite was promised and test votes were taken in a number of factories and meetings. They showed a majority against the law; whereupon the plebiscite was called off and the law promulgated by decree of December 27, 1936 (Code of Laws 1936, No. 34-309). The dangerous counter-revolutionary experiment of public discussion has never since been repeated. Moreover, the medical indications required by the new law to legalise an abortion, and the administrative procedure to obtain legalisation, are more severe than the corresponding regulations in Germany, Great Britain and the United States.

The last remark also applies to the new divorce laws of July, 1944. The procedure laid down for divorce amounts to an equivalent of the mediaeval pillory. The notice of bringing in a divorce action has to be advertised in the local newspaper at his or her own cost by the man or woman seeking divorce (Art. 24 Sect. c). What that means will be appreciated by anybody who has ever seen a Russian small town or village. Compulsory entries have to be made in the home passports of man and woman, giving full details of marriage and divorce—and Soviet home passports have to be produced on every occasion, whether to obtain bread rations, employment or permission to travel on a local train. The proceedings take place in open court, the People's Court—whose only function is to try to reconcile the couple. If a reconciliation does not take place, there the matter ends as far as the People's Court is concerned—it has no competence to pronounce a divorce. However, "the claimant has the right to apply for dissolution of the marriage in a higher court" (Art. 25). The next higher, Regional Court may or may not dissolve the marriage—this is entirely left to the judge's discretion, as the law gives no indication whatsoever of valid grounds for a divorce. As the officially avowed tendency of the new law is to



even the usual scales of hysteria. *Pravda's* editorial on the day following the decree asserted:

With us, for the first time in the history of peoples and countries, motherhood became a matter of solicitude on the part of the State.

This is an assertion of unusual stupidity even for home consumption, given the fact that in England, for instance, family allowances start with the second, not with the fourth child; and the further fact that when Nazi Germany began its birth-rate drive some years ago, with bachelor tax, money premiums and all the rest, the Soviet press echoed with justified derision about the "debasement of womanhood to the role of prize brood-mares." Without being of a particularly vindictive nature, one may wish that all leader-writers of the Soviet press should be compulsorily married to Mother Heroines.

\* \* \*

The history of Soviet legislation since Lenin's death is the history of a gradual freezing of individual liberties in every realm of life, right down to the liberty of movement in space. The decree of 27/12/1932 (Code o.L. 1932, 84-516), introducing the compulsory home-passport system, deprived the Soviet citizen of the right to travel freely in his own country. Special permission is needed to enter all the bigger industrial towns and the surrounding areas varying in radius from 20 to 100 kilometers; absence from home even of twenty-four hours has to be reported to the Police. Again we look in vain for a parallel in the peacetime regulations of any other modern country.

Travel abroad is banned except on government mission. Illegal attempts to reach a foreign country are punishable by death. To be sent abroad on an official mission is regarded as a danger—a person who has been abroad will on his return automatically fall under suspicion of having been "contaminated." To keep the country free from contamination, i.e., the knowledge of conditions of life abroad, to maintain the hermetic wall which has surrounded Russia for the past twenty-five years, is a vital issue for the regime to which all

other considerations have to be subordinated. Hence Russia's refusal to admit refugees from Nazi Germany which led to the breakdown of the Evian Conference in 1938 and of all attempts at an international solution of the problem; hence the refusal to admit the survivors of the International Brigades interned in French concentration camps; hence also the handing over of German anti-Fascists to Nazi Germany after the Stalin-Hitler pact—evidence of which, including names, is available in this country.

Once more we have to ask: What were the probable motives behind these developments? And once more the only possible answer is: The breakdown of the incentives for self-imposed discipline foreseen by the socialist theory, and their replacement by coercion and intimidation; with the additional necessity to prevent all knowledge of and comparison with conditions of life in countries under parliamentary democratic regimes.

## X

### THE NEW RULING CLASS

The nucleus of power in the Soviet Union is the Party. The radical changes both in leadership and membership which the Bolshevik Party underwent during the last decade are of fundamental importance for the understanding of the new regime; they give in a nutshell the significance of Stalinism.

First, the changes in leadership. I shall not repeat the names of the revolutionary leaders who were liquidated during the purges; it is sufficiently known that among the great figures of Lenin's period Stalin alone survives. It is, however, commonly assumed that the massacre by trial affected only the top stratum; that it was a kind of Olympian battle, a showdown among the leaders, in which Stalin rid himself of all rival personalities and rival policies to gain a free hand and thus be able to pursue his own line of subtle manoeuvring and temporising—which alone, it is asserted, could assure Russia's survival in the years of external and internal crisis. If this were so, the purges would represent merely a political crisis, solved with the ruthlessness which is in the traditions both of Russia and of the



Bolshevik Party, but nevertheless restricted to professional politicians, and not affecting the foundations of the revolutionary state. Such a crisis, except for the methods of its solution, would still be comparable to a cabinet crisis in democratic countries; it would not amount to a counter-revolution or "Thermidor."

But this interpretation of the purges is demonstrably wrong. They were not an affair of the top layer and the politicians, but affected the whole Party from top to bottom and completely changed its character. The following official figures will prove this.

The 17th Congress of the All-Soviet Bolshevik Party was held in January-February, 1934, before the purges.

The 18th Party Congress was held in March, 1939, just after the purges.

At the 17th Congress 22.6 per cent of the delegates had been Party members since before 1917, that is, since before the Revolution.

At the 18th Congress the corresponding figure was 2.4 per cent. In other words only one-tenth of them had survived the Party purge.\*

At the 17th Congress 17.7 per cent had been Party members since 1917, that is, had joined during the year of the revolution.

At the 18th Congress the corresponding figure was 2.6 per cent.

In round figures at the 17th Congress 40 per cent of the delegates dated their membership from before the Civil War; at the 18th Congress only 5 per cent.

The comparison becomes even more impressive if we take 1919 as the test year. At the 17th Congress 80 per cent of the delegates were "old party members" (since 1919 or before); at the 18th Congress the corresponding figure was 14.8 per cent.

In absolute figures the Party had at the time of the 18th Congress 1,588,852 members. Out of these only about 20,000—that is 1.3 per cent—were "old Bolsheviks" belonging to the Party since 1917 or earlier. But in 1918 the Party had numbered 260,000 to 270,000

\* These and all following figures are taken from the official Reports of the Mandate Commissions of the 17th and 18th Party Congresses, quoted by Schwartz: "Heads of Russian Factories" (*Social Research*, New York, September, 1942).

members, the majority of them young people. What had happened to them? Schwartz assumes that roughly one-fourth were killed during the civil war—a rather high estimate. That would still leave 200,000 survivors at the time of the 18th Congress. But only 20,000 remained in the Party—nine-tenths had disappeared, as the reports of the mandatory commissions show, between 1934 and 1939. And these were not leaders, not even Party delegates; they are the ordinary rank-and-file, the workers and peasants who had made the revolution and fought in the civil war.

The Bolshevik Party had emerged from the purges as a completely new body, which had with the Party of the heroic days of the revolution only the name and 1.3 per cent of its members in common.

But still, the apologist will perhaps say, it has remained a Party of workers and peasants. Has it? Again the official figures speak for themselves. According to the report of the Mandatory Commission at the 17th Congress, 9.3 per cent of the delegates were "workers from production," that is actual, not former, manual workers. At the 18th Congress the Mandatory Commission for the first time gave no figures as to the percentage of the workers among the delegates. The reason for this became clear during the Congress itself, which, with the usual unanimity, changed the statutes of the Party by eliminating those clauses which safeguarded the proletarian character of the Party—the clauses referring to the Party candidates' social origins. The Communist Party of Russia had thus, both in theory and in practice, ceased to be a Party of the working class. To make this the more obvious, not one of the famous Stakhanov workers who were paraded among the delegates of the 18th Congress was elected into the Central Committee of the Party, a large body consisting of 139 persons.

Who then is the Party, the all-powerful body of a million and a half people who occupy all responsible positions and administer the country? Who are the 90.7 per cent among the delegates who were already in 1934 *not* "workers from production"? The Soviet State knows only one great class of people besides them: the administrators of economy and state apparatus—bureaucracy and technocracy.



tive routine sentence of three to eight years' deportation to "Correctional" labour camps for unauthorised entry into Soviet territory. This fate was shared by all Poles who had sought refuge from the Germans in the Soviet Union. In B.'s case the proceeding took the following form:

In the night of February 26, 1941, I was ordered to collect my belongings and was taken downstairs. After some time I was led with some others into a big dark room. Without any explanations we were each given a slip of paper to sign. The slip contained three typewritten lines to the effect that the OSOB Y SOWYESCENIE (the Special Commission) of the OGPU in Lomza decreed that for the illegal crossing of the State Frontier, M. Wiszynsky was sentenced in accordance with Art. 120 of the Penal Code of the White Russian Republic to three years in a "Correctional" Labour Camp. The only thing left for me to do was to sign, which I did. Later on the Governor of the prison—who was at the same time Chairman of the Special Commission—told me that there were no specific charges against me; that was why I had got away with such a short sentence. Many others, former soldiers of the Polish army, got five years. A Jew whose name I cannot recall and who had been driven over the frontier by the Germans to Kolno got as much as eight years. The Special Commission had the right to inflict sentences up to eight years only. There was no appeal against their decision.

On April 4, 1941, Blit arrived in the labour camp of Plesek on the river Onega. It contained about 35,000 prisoners. In the sub-polar climate where the temperature even in June dropped under zero point Fahrenheit, the men and women had to work twelve to thirteen hours per day, felling trees in the snow-covered Arctic forest. Their food consisted of bread plus two hot soups between 4 and 5 A.M. and between 8 and 9 P.M.; in between, nothing but hot water. Sugar, fruit and vegetables were unknown, and in consequence of this all prisoners were attacked by scurvy; within the first few months they lost their teeth. No clothing, mattresses or blankets were provided; after a couple of weeks suits were reduced to rags, wet on return from work, frozen stiff during the night. Each man or woman was assigned the task of cutting 6 cubic metres (8 cubic yards) of wood per day.

duction and the abolition of the profit system—Russia remains fundamentally sane in the socialist sense, and sooner or later the new economic order will automatically rectify the warped political and cultural superstructure.

This statement contains two quite different assertions under the guise of one. The first is that the economic structure of Russia is historically progressive compared with private capitalistic economy. The second is that such nationalised economy is in itself a sufficient guarantee for the eventual emergence of a healthier and happier socialist society.

I believe the first assertion to be true, the second a fallacy.

Economically the Soviet Union represents State Capitalism. The State owns the means of production and controls the production and distribution of goods. The distinction between State Capitalism and State Socialism is from the economist's point of view meaningless. The difference between the two lies in the political and social structure of the country, in the question "The State controls everything, but who controls the State?" We have seen that the Soviet masses have no means to control either through elections or through trade unions, through political or economic pressure, the decisions of the State. The workers of the coal mines in the Urals have less influence on their wages, their working hours, their living conditions than the miners in Britain or the U.S.A. They cannot strike, they cannot elect their Union delegates, they cannot start a row in Parliament, in the press or in the streets. The Soviet workers "are not owners of their factories any more than the British citizen is owner of the British Navy" (Polanyi).

Russian State ownership and planning is economically progressive compared with private capitalism, in the same sense as Schacht's export-control and clearing system, as Nazi economic planning was superior to, and economically progressive compared with, Western *laissez-faire*. Hitlerite Germany before and during the war was rapidly moving towards State Capitalism. The power of the Junkers and industry magnates had been broken; industrialists had to produce what they were told, pay the wages they were told



and sell their produce at the price they were told. If they nominally still remained owners of their factories, their real control over them was limited much in the same way as the director's of a Soviet factory; and their income, though nominally still "profit," was fixed by the State just as the Soviet director's salary is. An analysis of the intricate term of "ownership" is to be found in Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* which, though questionable in many details, gives the gist of the matter. There is little doubt that Nazi economy moved along the road towards State Capitalism, and that even the halfway house they achieved was more efficient, and more progressive in the economic sense, than *laissez-faire* capitalism. Shall we therefore conclude that Nazism was on the road to socialism, towards a happier society? The man of the Left will indignantly reject this inference. Yet the same man of the Left will automatically base his claim that Russia is socialist on the same inference from economical to political structure.

This is the point where we have to part company with Trotskyites and other dissident communist sects, who maintain that, despite the "malignant growth" of Stalinite bureaucracy Russia, because of its nationalised economy, is still "basically" a socialist country. Without entering into Marxian scholastics, it is worth while to recall that Marx and Engels themselves, in spite of their numerous dialectical ambiguities, opposed the view that nationalisation alone guaranteed socialism—cf. Engels' remark that if this were so, the first socialist institution must have been the regimental tailor. *Historical evidence of the last decades proves that nationalisation and planning are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the creation of a socialist society.* Nationalisation and planning may lead to socialism or fascism—it depends on the political and ethical context. The Leftist contention that Soviet economy (i.e., nationalisation) is socialism is as spurious as the Rightist contention that state-control and planning are Fascism.

A planned, state-controlled economy is the inevitable next step of historical evolution, and thus "progressive" in the same sense as industrialisation, rationalisation, air-transport and artificial manure. We have seen how official Soviet demagogy identified socialism

responsibility to their contemporaries. *Historically* it makes little difference whether Hitler unifies Europe or some future figure. For within a century or two the rough edges of Nazism would have become polished down, race theory and Jew baiting would have shrunk to episodes of the past, and the lasting result would have been a unified Europe which, round about A.D. 2500 would have displayed much the same general features as the one which Hitler's successor will create. But *politically*, that is, counted in short time-units, the difference is enormous both as regards the amount of human suffering involved and the painful detour forced upon the river's course. The same applies to the Stalinite regime. It cannot invoke historical inevitability any more than Hitler or Marshal Pétain could as an excuse.

There are at least half a dozen nodal points in the history of Soviet Russia during the past two decades where the regime had the choice between two equally possible alternative courses which were in no way "historically determined." Such crossroads were, to quote only a few examples, the China policy of 1927; the agrarian policy of 1929-30 (i.e., the error, later indirectly admitted by Stalin, of rapid enforced collectivisation which drove the peasants into killing their cattle and burning their crops, and thus led to the famine, the purges, the terror); the Prussian policy of 1929 (collaboration between Communists and National Socialists against the Social Democratic government of Prussia); and finally the policy of 1939 (Stalin-Hitler pact). At none of these crossroads could historical inevitability or fatality serve as an excuse; in each case the regime assumed full subjective responsibility by crushing fractional inner party opposition advocating the alternative course. The objectively unfavourable starting conditions for the Soviet experiment were thus capped by subjective errors of the regime.

What were the common denominators of these errors, the motives which propelled Stalin's regime on its course? In the sphere of foreign policy we have already mentioned the ruthless subordination of the European working class to the interests of Russia, based on the doctrine of socialism in one country, which led to socialism in no country at all. To this we have to add the gross ignorance of



created. They were new and precarious psychological forces which needed constant encouragement, a warm and fraternal human climate to grow and become stable, and finally to transform the whole habitus of man, to create the new type of *homo sapiens liber*. The regime, grown from the roots of nineteenth century materialism, never recognised the decisive importance of the spiritual factor. Based on the axiom that the end justifies the means, quickly tired of the inertia and dumbness of the peasant masses, they treated the living people as raw material in a laboratory experiment, working on the tender malleable mass with hammers, chisels, acids, and showers of propaganda rays of ever varying wave length. For the superficial observer the method worked. The people apparently believed all that was said to them, hailed their leaders, worked like robots, died like heroes—like the robots and heroes which the German or Japanese produced. But inside them the new springs had snapped and had to be replaced by the old ones, fetched from the dusty shelves of the lumber room.

The Russian Revolution has failed in its aim to create a new type of human society in a new moral climate. The ultimate reason for its failure was the arid nineteenth-century materialism of its doctrine. It had to fall back on the old opiates because it did not recognise man's need for spiritual nourishment.

## THE END OF AN ILLUSION

"One swift blow to Poland, first by the German army and then by the Red army, and nothing was left of this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty which had existed by oppressing non-Polish nationalities. . . . Everybody realises that there can be no question of restoring old Poland."—Molotov, October 31, 1939.

"I always wanted a strong and independent Poland."—Stalin, repeatedly in 1944.

*always agree with Stalin (Molotov to John [unclear]) 1944*

### I

#### METHODS OF RUSSIAN POWER POLITICS

##### I

The results of our inquiry\* can be summed up as follows:

Soviet Russia is a State-capitalistic totalitarian autocracy. It is progressive in its economic structure and regressive in every other respect. Politically, culturally, in the relations between rulers and ruled, it is reactionary compared with most capitalist democracies. It pursues an expansionist policy which, though operating with new methods, reflects the old historic aims of Imperial Russia.

To the working classes and the progressive forces in other parts of the world Russia has no more specific significance than any other great Power. She is neither a menace to the Right nor a concern of the Left. Her attitude to the Right and Left parties in other countries is exclusively determined by the momentary interests of her power politics. In future as in the past she will choose and drop her allies regardless of their political philosophy, according to the demands of the moment.

This, however, requires two qualifications. First, there is a difference between the power politics of Russia and other states. Power politics are necessarily opportunist and cynical; in critical situations ethical principles are always sacrificed to expediency.

\* See the previous essay "Soviet Myth and Reality."



facing the long, crumbling walls and moats of an ancient fortress. This does not mean that the ram will actually attack the wall; it only means that the men behind the ram and the men behind the moat, however amicable their relations, both know at the back of their minds the potentialities of the situation. And these potentialities must inevitably translate themselves into latent pressure.

According to the laws of least resistance, this pressure will be the stronger the more exposed and vulnerable the point of attack: that is, in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and on the Continent of Europe. Expressed by a polite euphemism, the aim of this pressure is to procure "zones of influence." But the definition of this term depends entirely on the balance of forces. Where the balance is nearly equal, such zones merely mean trading facilities and political treaties; e.g., Britain and Portugal. A tilt of the scales, and the same term means the use of airfields and strategic bases; the zone of influence has become a satellite country. One further tilt, and we get puppet governments and all but official incorporation into the bigger state: e.g., Japan and Manchukuo. Finally direct incorporation either by military conquest or by terror referendum: e.g., Eastern Poland and the Baltic States.

When people talk of "expansion," even the politically educated are apt to think in static and antiquated terms. The Nazis spoke of the Russians as "Asiatic hordes" and tried to scare us with the anachronistic picture of Stalin-Genghis Khan riding with his Cossacks to Boulogne; in Conservative clubland the Russian conquest of Czechoslovakia is conceived of in the old-fashioned terms of straightforward military conquest. Hence the general incredulity regarding the real perspectives of Russian expansion on the Continent. The possibilities of modern political warfare by internal disruption and vassalisation were by no means exhausted by Hitler and are not yet appreciated in their true significance.

The structure of the Soviet Federation, comprising nationalities as widely different as Eskimos from Ukrainians and Estonians from Turkmenians, has a far greater capacity to absorb new countries than the racially homogeneous German Empire. For the Reich, swallowing Czechoslovakia meant swallowing a foreign body under danger



of choking; for the U.S.S.R., the incorporation of a new "autonomous Republic" means merely the addition of a new stone to its racial mosaic. The constitutional reform of 1943, by granting a greater semblance of autonomy to members of the Federation, considerably improved the absorbing capacity of the framework. The gates are wide open to receive any newcomer, be it the Hungarian, Slovakian or Saxonian Autonomous Soviet Republic. Needless to say that in each case there would be gradual transitions of varying duration, and that each final adhesion would have the appearance of a voluntary act.

The question "how far Stalin intends to go" is naïve and meaningless. The expansion of great Empires follows certain dynamic laws. A great power surrounded by a political vacuum will expand its zones of influence until it feels a growing pressure of resistance. The greater density of communications, higher industrialisation and living standard of the countries west of Russia exert the pull; the desire for more and more security and power provide the push; the traditions of Pan Slavism and the century-old aspirations at hegemony over Poland, the Balkans and Constantinople provide the historical background. The drive for access to the world trade-lines through the Mediterranean, the Baltic and North Atlantic must inevitably follow. There is no possibility of saturation in a vacuum.

On the other hand, each new increase in power means an increase in attraction towards the small states, unable to maintain their independence without outside aid. They have to become protégés of the big neighbour, to be gradually transformed into satellites and knit closer and closer into his framework. Within fifty years from the first appearance of railways in Europe the three-hundred-odd independent German principalities became unified in the Reich. The same process of amalgamation is now inevitable on the European scale; the jigsaw puzzle of dwarf states cannot outlast the opening of the age of aviation by more than a few decades. Germany became unified by the most militant, autocratic and spartan of its states. The Soviets occupy today the same position towards Eastern and Central Europe as Prussia did towards the other German states in the middle of last century.



present among the determinants of the lower level; the "destiny" of a level is its dependence on the laws of the next higher level—laws which it cannot predict nor reduce.

In other words: the freedom of the whole is the destiny of the part; the only way to comprehend destiny is to comprehend one's part-ness. That is precisely what the mystics said. But that does not mean a victory of mysticism over science; only the recognition of the limitations of science within its own terms of reference.

## VI

It is fascinating to watch how the concept of a hierarchy of levels and of their irreducibility by uniform quantitative laws arose independently in various branches of science.

In psychology, quantitative measurements began to fade into the background at the beginning of the century; Gestalt-psychology, developed by Koehler, Koffka and Wertheimer in the late 'twenties is entirely dominated by the concept of "wholeness" and the specific laws which integrate elementary sense-data into perceptual wholes.

Let the whole be a triangle; then, by analysing into its parts I get three straight lines of given length which I can measure. But obviously a black line of two inches in length is *as a sense-perception* something quite different from the hypotenuse of a triangle. Its specific character can only be perceived if it is in its proper place in the whole. *As a sense perception* "black line" is as different from "hypotenuse" as a kidney cell in isolation from a kidney cell in the kidney. I have twice italicised the words "*as a sense perception*" because *on the drawing board* the black line remains unchanged whether it is part of a triangle or not. I may cover the other two sides and the line remains the same—in its physical existence on the paper. But as a *percept* it does not remain the same. On the perceptual level the black line changes its character when exposed to the influence of the other two parts. This interaction of perceptual elements in the mental field is as real as the interaction of kidney cells. Accordingly it must have some physiological equivalent in the brain, and Koehler assumes that there are self-distribut-

ing electro-magnetic currents between the cortical projections of retinal points. Other physiological hypotheses are equally possible; the essential point is not the nature of the physiological process but the fact that on the level of the drawing-board the three lines are a static mosaic which leave one another alone, whereas on the brain-mind level they automatically enter into dynamical relations with one another and emerge as wholes. All this may appear as fairly obvious to the layman who does not realise how hopelessly bogged the old atomistic psychology had become in its ambiguous distinctions of "sensation," "perception," "meaning," etc. In atomistic psychology the brain served as a kind of screen on to which the retina projected its static mosaic; this implied the necessity of a second observer or brain who transformed the "sensation" into "perception" and invested it with the "meaning" of triangularity. Gestalt-psychology does not explain the emergence of the mental level just as biology does not explain the emergence of life; but once that level is given, the things which are lifted on to it become integrated by specific organising relations, and the mystery of the mind is reduced to the already familiar principle of a hierarchy of qualitatively different levels.

## VII

We may imagine our hierarchy of levels as a series of terraces on an ascending slope, or as a broad ascending staircase. Then the horizontal surfaces of the steps will represent the field in which the laws of a given level operate, and the vertical surfaces the "jumps" which lead to the emergence of the higher levels. The succession of steps will be roughly this: space-time, sub-atomic phenomena, physics, chemistry, crystals (paracrystals, viruses), non-dividing organic constituents (proteins, enzymes, hormones, etc.), dividing organic constituents (cell-parts and some cells), higher (non-dividing) cells and organs; and so on up to the higher mental functions. Some of these steps will have to be divided into sub-steps and in the higher regions the staircase will branch out; but this can be neglected from the point of view of our argument. There will also be "mezofoms"—hybrids like the paracrystals and



emerge, facilitated by a "vertical" approach which brings to the dry concepts of part-ness, love and all-oneness the igniting spark of experienced reality. Neither the saint nor the revolutionary can save us; only the synthesis of the two. Whether we are capable of achieving it I do not know. But if the answer is in the negative, there seems to be no reasonable hope of preventing the destruction of European civilisation, either by total war's successor Absolute War, or by Byzantine conquest—within the next few decades.

It needs no great intellectual acumen to see this, and only the inertia of our imagination prevents us from believing it—just as in peace we never believe that there will be a war, and in war that there will ever be peace again. For beneath the Cassandra-voice of reason there is another smug and smiling voice in us, which whispers into our ear the gentle lie that we shall never die, and that tomorrow will be like yesterday.

It is time we learnt to distrust that voice.

October, 1944.