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# FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE PRESENT

AN interesting contrast is presented by two letters addressed to the editors of MANAS, which arrived at almost the same time. One is from a European reader who lives in West Germany, the other from an American reader who lives in Illinois. The letters are concerned with the same subject—the editors' views of "Communism." The West German correspondent thinks it is wrong to identify all Communists and Communist policy with the revolutionary conceptions and methods of Nicolai Lenin; the Illinois correspondent fears that the editors are not sufficiently aware of the evils of Leninism carried forward by present-day communists. Both writers are friendly and earnest in their desire to bring a clarifying light to the questions involved.

We shall avoid being drawn into decisive argument on this subject, not because it has no importance, but because we do not think the argument would be fruitful, especially if the presentation of "sides" were to be limited to something less than eight pages of an issue of MANAS. If we had thirty-two pages instead of eight, it might be worth while to print both letters in full; but this material ought then to be supplemented with long reading lists which would enable readers to research for themselves questions of fact and theory. Even then, big issues would remain unsettled. The main question is an old one: What will people—in this case the Russians—do? So far as we can tell, very few inquirers are able to settle such questions from the facts turned up by research. Usually, the temperamental polarities represented, say, by John Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau, determine human decisions in this area: on the one hand, a cynical and contemptuous judgment of human nature; on the other, a romantic or sentimental view.

Occasionally you find a remarkable union of political sagacity with moral sensibility, as in a man like George Kennan, one in whom extensive experience in politics and international diplomacy has born a rich fruit of practical wisdom; or, in a man such as William O. Douglas, whose world-girdling travels and exhaustive knowledge of history and law have made of him the best possible "elder statesman"; but the rarity of public servants of this stature is a great political misfortune of the age. Instead of balanced opinions and suspended judgment, you get a torrent of cocksure assertions as to what may be expected from other nations, as though the generation of the emotions of war were no more important than the opening gambit in a game of chess.

It takes more responsibility than we wish to assume to issue sweeping statements concerning the probabilities of Communist behavior. We find that we have no competence in predicting even the behavior of the United States, so how could we be right about Russia? Before last April we would have sworn that the United States would never permit what was permitted by our government in the case of Cuba. We now must plead innocence and ignorance in such affairs.

Perhaps we should discuss a bit this matter of "Leninism," to show how many incommensurable elements are involved in the forming of judgments. Our American correspondent cites Lenin's contemptuous opposition to all "gradualist" approaches to social change, his repeated advocacy of violence, his absolute rejection of the claims of "bourgeois" morality, and concludes: "We wish the editors would inform themselves and then waste no time in impressing their readers with the idea that intellectual and spiritual freedom (such as outlined in the fine new series on Thoreau) as well as physical freedom is in grave

danger. Just to say we do not like communism is not enough. We must thoroughly know its philosophy, its aims and methods."

Our European correspondent, on the other hand, finds us all too familiar with classical Leninist doctrine. He writes:

> Now, you describe the Communists according to the principles Lenin set up for them. I know that indeed he has said there is no morality other than what serves the Party or the Revolution. I know that Lenin not only preached this utter contempt for morality, but also practiced it. Historians say that there never was in history a political party as immoral and as pervaded by spies and destructive elements as was the Bolshevik Party under Lenin.
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> But Lenin died some thirty-five years ago. These words of his about no respect for morality are quoted often, in the West where this is convenient. Lenin is still venerated as the hero of the Revolution in Russia—but Nikita Khrushchev said quite recently, at the Assembly of the Romanian Communist Party this spring, referring to another of Lenin's views, often quoted now in the West and in China:
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> "One should not now repeat mechanically what Lenin said many years ago about Imperialism, and always say that imperialistic wars are unavoidable. . . . One cannot repeat what the great Lenin has said under completely different historical circumstances without taking account of the actual situation and the change of power relations that has taken place since then. If Lenin could get out of his tomb, he would take such people by the ear and teach them how things have to be considered. . . ."
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> That this is not mere prattle is shown by the fact that Khrushchev quarreled for over a week with the Chinese leaders, who still insisted that war is unavoidable, until he finally got them to recognize that this is not so any longer.

There are some encouraging possibilities in the suggestions of this correspondent; we have seen them weighed and considered in responsible publications ever since Mr. Khrushchev made his historic, eight-hour speech attacking Stalinism, after which the Soviet leader released many thousands of political prisoners in Russia, his example then being followed by some of the satellite governments.

We do not know, and we do not think the experts know, how far leading Communists have gone in renouncing Leninist principles. Perhaps they have not gone far at all; perhaps it is impossible for a new spirit to pervade the management of Soviet policies so long as the world is divided into nuclear-armed camps; but we are unable to believe that Leninism has become an absolute and unchangeable ingredient of the Soviet character. Human character is not that immutable. What we call "Leninism" is a product of social and historical forces; as the forces change, some other combination of attitudes and motives may be expected to develop. The business of the contemporary observer is to do what he can to take note of this sort of causation, and not simply to cite Leninist slogans as though they were written in Communist-type stars.

Communism is of course a cultural matrix as well as a political system. Intensive training in the communist ideology produces a particular kind of mentality. We recently noted Frank S. Myer's *The Moulding of Communists* (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1961) as being a thorough study of the process that gave power and verisimilitude to Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon.* What this sort of indoctrination leads to, at a mass level, is plainly and horribly illustrated in *The Dark Side of the Moon* (Scribner's, 1947, with an introduction by T. S. Eliot), the story of what happened to a million Poles—men, women, and children—who were deported by the Soviets to concentration camps in Russia during World War II, written by a few survivors. (Reviewed in MANAS for April 21, 1948.) Then there is the experience of communist methods in labor organizations in this country, referred to in MANAS for June 28 of this year:

> Americans in labor unions have first-hand knowledge of the deceit and betrayal which Communists use as a matter of course in attempting to control labor organizations. Communists do not believe in the democratic process, but they will use it, exploit its respect for individuals and twist its guarantees to minorities to suit purposes which are

> aimed at destroying, in the end, every vestige of individual and minority rights.

Communism is all this, and many more bad things, but the important question that remains to be answered is what we are going to do about it, other than blow it off the face of the earth with thermo-nuclear bombs. The alternatives are fairly simple. We can have another world war and destroy ourselves along with the Communists in the process. We can make an honest attempt at peaceful co-existence, which means establishing as many ways as possible of having non-political, peaceful relationships with the peoples of communist countries, without changing our own principles or trying to alter theirs. Or, finally, we can attempt by persuasion and example to convince them that there is a better way of life.

If you choose the second and third alternatives—and what else, in the name of sanity, can you choose?—certain responsibilities immediately appear. The first is the admission that Communism, whatever it is, is not the result of an invasion from Mars. It is the offspring of the social conditions and historical forces of nineteenth-century Europe. It began as a movement undertaken by human beings. It is still a movement undertaken by human beings. The question is: *Why* did these human beings adopt views and initiate actions so alien to our understanding of goodness and righteousness? Were they infested by devils? Do we need a manual of demonology such as the inquisitors of the Middle Ages relied upon to explain the emergence of Communism in the nineteenth century, or can we have a rational, historical explanation for its existence?

Unfortunately, the most easily heard warnings against Communism and its works totally neglect such questions. Not knowing or wanting to know anything about the origins of this movement, we are reduced to a hunt-out-the-devils-and-destroy-them sort of solution. And when we see the leaders of some newly created nation treating the Communist leaders as though they were human beings instead of monsters in disguise, we marvel at the moral blindness of the unsophisticated "natives" who so easily become dupes of Kremlin craft. What other theory have we to go by?

These questions are enormously complicated, having to do with the "natives' " past experience of free enterprise, their personal enjoyment of "civil liberties" and the number of square meals they have had in the land of their birth since the day they were born.

Our European correspondent has a paragraph which speaks to a similar point:

> I was in jail in Spain for many years under the Franco regime. Among my fellow prisoners there were many Communists. Most of them, but not all were "new" Communists. As Franco, in order to win sympathies in England, France, and the United States, made extensive propaganda to the effect that "the Communists are my most serious enemies," it was natural that many, many people in Spain who never had any idea of Marxism or "Dialectical Materialism" or anything of the kind, joined the Communists. They wanted to be on the side of the people who were the "most serious enemies" of the man who had killed their friends, thrown them in prison and ruined their lives.

These "new" communists are not convinced Bolshevists of the sort our American correspondent describes, but people caught in one of the great eruptions of modern history, and cast up on a shore which adds them anonymously and statistically to the mass of one "side" in the ideological war. Millions upon millions of human beings have been subjected to similar causes. You may say that their views need "correction," but how are you going to go about it?

Unfortunately, the project of warning people against the dangers of the communist menace has too often become a lucrative profession instead of a serious inquiry into the social and economic problems of the world. There is no human sympathy in this project, no true love of liberty, no deep regard for the dignity of man, but only an effort to marshal the forces of fear and suspicion behind façades of self-satisfaction and military

strength. It is getting so that it is difficult to make a conscientious criticism of Communism without seeming to ally yourself with efforts of this sort.

There can be little doubt but that political communism is a betrayal of honest labor, that the controls ultimately established over human behavior by the authoritarian bureaus of the Communist state leave little or no room for the kind of freedom which the peoples of the democratic societies are used to and demand. The fact is, however, that the communists are not really competing for attention from the affluent societies. They are after the millions of hungry, dispossessed, and mistreated peoples who, after centuries of subjection to colonial powers, are now beginning to have some control over their own affairs. These people, until they learn from experience, are going to make choices according to *their* past, not ours.

If Americans were willing to learn a little about the historical causes of the communist movement of the nineteenth century, they would be in a better position to reduce the operation of those causes in the twentieth, and thus provide opportunity for free societies to prosper and grow. And the most deadly enemy of freedom is war, for the reason that war, besides breeding poverty and disaster and death, makes centralized, authoritarian control of national resources and production an absolute necessity. The state geared for war is only nominally different from the state geared for centralized economic control.

As for Communism in America, it has always seemed to us that the real Communist leaders in Russia must regard the American Communist Party as a fairly childish enterprise with a completely hopeless objective. To the American working man, the idea of Communism for the United States is completely ridiculous. The labor movement in this country has been a conservative force for years, and while communist infiltrations have occurred and have damaged one or two unions, it is fair to say that Communism in the United States has never been much more than a nuisance kept alive by neurotics. The gradual socialization of the economic institutions of the United States is an entirely different question, having practically nothing to do with either the communist or the socialist movement. There are serious, scholarly, non-political sociological studies of this process as it has operated over fifty and more years as a result of multiple causes which are independent of ideological arguments and propaganda. The argument about the merits of this change is a separate argument, worth going into, perhaps, but not in connection with the "Communist menace." (See *Development of Collective Enterprise,* Seba Eldridge, University of Kansas Press, 1943.)

We are not now going to proceed to a criticism of Capitalist institutions, in the context thus far established. While it is often to the point to look critically at our "free enterprise" society, to do so here would be to dignify a serious argument about the comparative merits of Communism and Democracy. The comparison, we think, is artificial and worthless. It could be pursued, but only in the United States where we have a free press.

One basic trouble with this kind of argument is that it seems to submit to the view that the decisive values of human life are political and economic. Our position is that they are not; our position is that the true values of human life are hidden, suppressed, and degraded by excessive attention to political and economic values. The great need is to get beyond political and economic values to the qualities of man's life which give whatever validity they have to political and economic values. The fact is that the American form of government and way of life do leave room—ample room in theory, and some, if not enough, in fact—for the free pursuit of those higher qualities, whereas the Communist doctrine is overtly materialistic and has a fine collection of epithets to apply to the people who hold to the importance of subjective and moral values. So far as we are concerned, the Communist theory has

no case at all at this level. If you want to argue about the operational merits of the two societies, regardless of theory, at other levels of value, you have to know what you are talking about and that means you have to travel, make notes, study the lives of the people, see how they feel, how much they enjoy their work, estimate their sense of dignity in accomplishment. If you don't get first-hand information about these things, you are likely to display only a bigoted ignorance in what you say—just as Russian critics of the United States, for example, talk as though the robber barons of the nineteenth century were still running the country.

One more point: Our American correspondent is troubled by Gandhi's statement that "the Bolshevik ideal has behind it the purest sacrifice of countless men and women who have given up their all for its sake, and an ideal that is sanctified by the sacrifices of such master spirits as Lenin cannot go in vain; the noble example of their renunciation will be emblazoned for ever and quicken and purify the ideal as time passes."

This view of Lenin, it is suggested, "is simply a reflection of his own (Gandhi's) innate goodness." We do not contradict our correspondent, but add that Gandhi was not naive. He encountered plenty of violence, spent many years in prison. He was no innocent without knowledge of the evil in the world. He acknowledged that brave men often used violence to obtain ends they believed would serve the general good. Perhaps he had studied Lenin's life and knew of the extraordinary commitment of this man. Lenin, incidentally, was not the first revolutionist to insist upon war. Tom Paine went to great lengths to persuade reluctant colonists to join in the American war for independence. It did not make him a fiend in human form. Lenin, it is true, was all out for wars which would exhaust the resources of the nations of Europe and ready them for revolution. He saw the 1914-18 war in this light and reproved communist opponents of the war. The Germans carried him in a sealed car to the Finland Station to test his theory, hoping that they would be relieved of Russian pressure on the eastern front. It worked.

Lenin is no doubt to be held responsible for some of the agony the world suffers today. So are some others, and so may we be held responsible for what we advocate, say, and do. But if we seek understanding, and not only grounds for condemnation, it might be worth the time to read a biography of Lenin, say, Veale's *Man from the Volga* (Long and Smith, 1932), and then go on to a wider field of reading to throw light on the turbulent revolutionary movement of modern history. The following books are reasonably impartial: *To the Finland Station,* by Edmund Wilson (Anchor); *Inside the Left,* by Fenner Brockway (London: Allen & Unwin); and *The Root Is Man,* by Dwight Macdonald (Cunningham Press). There are a lot of other books, of course, but these will do to get anyone started. For the American scene, *Clarence Darrow for the Defense* by Irving Stone is a kind of encyclopedia of social issues. Stone's fictionalized life of Eugene Debs, *Adversary in the House,* is a moving study of a great American radical. If you want to go back into American history, there is Arthur Morgan's life of Edward Bellamy, which is rich in distinctions between European and indigenous American socialism. Louis Adamic's *Dynamite* is a valuable study of the use of violence in the American labor movement, well worth reading for background. Another book of this sort is Lincoln Steffens' *Autobiography.*

Current history is the continuation of the past. To understand the present it is necessary to know something of the past, especially if the objective is to improve the present.

# *Letter from*
## YUGOSLAVIA

BELGRADE.—The Yugoslavs have pulled up their socks. They have also mowed the grass in Belgrade parks, cleaned the streets, and drastically curtailed customs and immigration formalities.

Downtown Belgrade is literally washed every night with fat, black fire-hoses, there being no mobile equipment. As a symbol, this will do: there is a marked spirit of make-do and of improvement evident here. I have been told that gross national production has been doubled in five years. But whatever the figure-jugglers say, the signs of improvement in levels of living are a thrill and a surprise. Where two years ago a single large building was rising across the river in "New Belgrade," there are now literally a score of huge, completed, 5-to-8-storey blocks of flats, and others going up. Housing nevertheless remains the bottleneck, and everyone from clerks to diplomats faces it.

There is also evidence of a kind of thought-control. My daily researches, while perhaps not scientifically complete, have revealed one newsstand, of perhaps twenty examined, where the New York *Times* can be purchased. The copies on display were old, and the stand was a good mile from the hotels used by international visitors. Is this only a coincidence?

Restriction or control of the availability or flow of information, within or into a country, is an oddly growing feature of people's lives. The U.S. Information Service has been undergoing some sort of crisis. A new law which sounds innocent enough prescribes that information centers must be physically separated from their corresponding diplomatic missions, must have their own staff and premises, and may publish news bulletins by agreement with the Yugoslav government. If it be assumed that the output of such centers is as full of booby-traps as the Yugoslavs' own, one can see why some control of them is thought to be necessary. It is convincingly suggested by observers here that the real object of this new law is the "information" activities of the other Communist states, ferociously intent as they are upon undermining the Yugoslav heresy.

But restriction and control tend to appear both capricious and stupid. My Yugoslav friends, government officials all, take the New York *Times*. Each gets it by mail, several days late because of the censor, but always gets it. This describes the censor as an efficient delaying action, while not very good protection—to what sensible end is not clear.

Yet people are being drowned in a flood of words as never before. A recent issue of *Time* magazine, a source not perhaps to be taken entirely as Gospel, suggests "an increasingly apparent Kennedy credo: 'When in doubt, talk'." The Yugoslav *Review* for March of this year proudly opens an article: "Over a hundred men and women spoke from the rostrum on the two days of the Congress—." Taken together with the activities of the General Assembly of the United Nations, this might be thought to indicate a world-wide conspiracy to stun us into permanent insensibility with a spate of words.

It is certainly not so with the informal spoken word. Good conversation is a real rarity. It requires give and take. Some people want only to give. Others have become so soggy from taking—whether it be from politics or from TV—that they have forgotten how to give. I sometimes wonder whether MANAS is not one of the few opportunities for real give and take remaining extant. Certainly one of the magazine's prime characteristics is that of a feeling of continuous conversation between editors and readers.. It achieves a sort of synthesis between the written and the spoken word, much cherished by us who rove.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

# *REVIEW*
## TWENTIETH-CENTURY SYNTHESIS

RODERICK SEIDENBERG, whose book, *Posthistoric Man*, was published in 1950, has made another report on man and the cosmos. The present volume, also issued by Chapel Hill, is titled *Anatomy of the Future.* Its conclusion: Prometheus is still chained to the rock. His liberator, Heracles, has as yet not even appeared on the horizon, although there have been a few false dawns with spurious promise of the titan's final emancipation.

The thesis of *Posthistoric Man* was that the human race is slowly being trapped into moral immobility by the encroaching mechanisms of rationalized control of the natural and human worlds. Eventually, the mournful prediction went, the few remaining seeds of originality and novelty in human behavior would be turned to powder by the heat-death of perfect organization, and uniqueness for man would cease to be, ushering in the posthistoric epoch where each act and even thought would be a mechanical, reversible equation—no history at all. *Posthistoric Man* was sufficiently documented from the literature of science to cause an anguished stir among the more thoughtful of Mr. Seidenberg's readers. The book was widely and disconsolately reviewed. MANAS got around to a notice of Mr. Seidenberg's work in 1957 (issue of July 3).

Partly because we wish to encourage readers to get *Anatomy of the Future* for themselves, and partly because we fear to oversimplify its thesis, we shall not attempt a summary. But some other things may be said. In a sense, this book represents a transition in the authorities relied upon by serious thinkers—philosophical thinkers—of the modern world. The move is from science to philosophy, to humanistic psychology and art. While science is represented in *Anatomy of the Future* by Harrison Brown and Julian Huxley, these writers are themselves in the forefront of the philosophizing sector of the scientific world. But the grounds of Mr. Seidenberg's discussion are more plainly found in the works of Erich Fromm, Erich Kahler, Lewis Mumford, and Waldo Frank. Obviously, Mr. Seidenberg's anchor in the ocean floor of scientific fact has been dragging for many of the years between publication of *Posthistoric Man* and *Anatomy of the Future.* His thesis has not changed especially, but this book has more of the organic quality and wholeness of a work of art.

What is the problem? It has many versions, but the following statement from chapter two is explicit:

> In response to the sheer complexity of our endless means, we are relentlessly driven to increased order, systematization, and coordination. We are driven, in other words, to achieve greater predictability in every phase and aspect of the social fabric. Stated negatively, social organization thus demands the elimination of chaos, caprice, and uncertainty—the exclusion of all that is inchoate, spontaneous, indefinable. Stated positively, the principle of organization implies the establishment of ever greater conformity, standardization, uniformity, and regimentation—the realization of a system as explicit, defined, and concrete in respect to its ends as to its means.
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> Hence modern society, irrespective of the particular character and structure of governments, is moving everywhere towards increased correlation and systematization of its manifold activities. And thus, through ever larger areas of the modern world we may perceive, in varying degrees to be sure, a profound parallelism in the basic relationship between the individual and society in which the status of the individual as such is undergoing a radical transformation—a profound convergence under the dominance of the mass. For we are entering, in a wholly new sense, a mass civilization in a collectivized world, a civilization, that is to say, in which the essential integrity and idiosyncrasy of the person is sacrificed, necessarily, to the impersonal average of the mass.

How is the individual to preserve himself against this massive onslaught of uniformity? If this were Mr. Seidenberg's question, he could answer it easily. The elite of any society have the skill and the sagacity to abstract themselves from

the gears of the machine and find some garden of random reality in which to pursue their meditations and expose their originality to one another. Aristotle's country gentleman would not be upset by this prospect, nor would the Zen philosopher waste tears over the fate of the mechanized mass. But Mr. Seidenberg cannot solve the problem thus, which for him is no solution at all. For him, a principle is at stake. The blessed ghost of every martyr of the struggle for freedom stands at his shoulder, whispering the dream of a regenerated mankind. The social philosopher of the West, of the twentieth century, must carry on his back the full weight of the moral vision of his predecessors—the men who preached and fought for the brotherhood of man. We can no more abandon the universalism of the eighteenth century than we can jettison the machines of today. It is to the credit of the best men of our time that they are unable to think in terms of private salvation. They are one with Prometheus in this respect. Prometheus suffered and endured, "For that to men he bare too fond a mind."

Mr. Seidenberg, we should like to propose, is one of the new myth-makers. A myth-maker is a man who understands enough of the human situation to put the commensurable elements of man's life into commensurable terms, and who is wise enough to refuse to try to contain the incommensurable with limiting definitions.

Why is Mr. Seidenberg a myth-maker? In the Greek legend, Prometheus is a rebel on the side of mankind, against the Olympian order. Zeus is the force of human bondage. You could say, if you wanted to mix the image, that Zeus stands with Jehovah and the Grand Inquisitor, four-square for morality, control, order, and predictability, while Prometheus ranges with Lucifer and Jesus, in behalf of the spirit of man. In his myth for the twentieth century, Mr. Seidenberg brings Zeus down from his heavenly abode and installs him as the rational (better say, "rationalizing") nature of human beings. Like Buddha, he preaches, "Ye suffer from yourselves, none else compels." But the escape is no less unlikely, no less difficult. The bonds of rationality seem to be part of the inexorable logic of the laws of life. To progress on earth is to create forms which become prisons. If you do not see this as a miserable destiny, Mr. Seidenberg implies, you belong with the stern utopians of the Grand Inquisitor, with whom, once they make up their minds, the Prometheans can have no significant speech, even as Jesus remained silent in his cell.

At the risk of seeming frivolous, we urge that Mr. Seidenberg is wrestling with a purely metaphysical problem. That it is precipitated upon our attention dressed up in the elaborate and creaking garb of technology and authoritarian politics is only an accident of history—the history we happen to be experiencing.

The question is this: How can man, ideally a being of freedom, become creative without submitting to the captivity of his creations? How can mind wear a form without suffering the limits imposed by that form? How can man participate in an inexorable process without going to an inexorable doom?

Honesty will not permit Mr. Seidenberg to promise that he or any one of us will learn how to cut the Gordian knot, or how to walk on the water without experiencing the well-known gravitational effect. Yet this book is no dirge. It is rather a modern expression of the tragic muse. Classical art attains its distinction by the symmetry in which it presents the human situation, and it gains its inspiration from the promise of stubborn struggle, the inward dignity of high resolve. Mr. Seidenberg's book has these qualities.

The wonder of the human spirit, through the ages, is its capacity, when an epoch reaches its climactic moment, to embody the constant elements of experience in an art form which is all-embracing for the circumstances and vision of that time. We do not mean to suggest that Mr. Seidenberg has encompassed this ideal, but that he moves toward such a climax in *Anatomy of the*

*Future*, as do the writers on whom he relies for some of the substance of his book.

Plato's *Republic* is a work which may serve as a criterion of the expression we are talking about, to which might be added the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*. A similar synthesis is found in the Buddha's exquisite discourse concerning meaning, best understood by Westerners, perhaps, in the eighth book of Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is another and possibly the greatest of all the Oriental assemblages of the issues of the human situation. *Anatomy of the Future* is a work which shapes the issues of the twentieth century in the terms and at the level with which modern man is most concerned. Unlike the past, however, when such classics usually came in the form of religious revelation or high hierarchical utterance, our age is a time of widespread literacy and endless individuality in thinking, so that the mood of impersonal science and tough-minded independent reflection sets the keynote of the synthesis of which modern man is capable. It is on this ground that we recommend Mr. Seidenberg's book for serious reading. It is published at $3.50 by the University of North Carolina Press.

# *COMMENTARY*
## WHO SHAPES OUR ENDS?

A PARAGRAPH in Mr. Seidenberg's *Anatomy of the Future* (see Review) puts very well the reasons for our comparative indifference to the hot war of words between Communist and Capitalist ideologues. While our correspondents (see lead article) may worry about our failure to criticize either Communism or Capitalism with sufficient fervor, we worry about *their* indifference to matters neither side is doing anything to correct—probably for the reason that these deficiencies are built-in characteristics of both systems. Mr. Seidenberg writes:

> Despite their avowed indifference in aims and objectives, Russia and America are basically akin by reason of the dominance of their organizational trends. What is overt and explicit in the one case is implicit and latent to the point of being hidden, in the other. If the monolithic structure of Soviet society invited that long-range planning first introduced by Russia's five-year plans and now adopted by other countries as well, we too, beneath the beguiling remnants of our faith in individual freedom and initiative, are irredeemably following a parallel course in response to the inherent demands of our own highly complex industrial civilization. In the work of planning commissions, in the far-flung decisions of our major corporations, in the projected schemes of our more influential institutions of finance, labor, industry, research, and education, and even in the haphazard policies of our governmental agencies, we are moving, in a piecemeal fashion it is true, towards higher levels of co-ordination and unification, and—inherently and inexorably—towards greater uniformity, standardization, and regimentation. If our course is indirect and our pace retarded, that is due in large measure to the fact that our culture, rooted in the past, functions on the basis of essentially incompatible principles the idea of the free individual founded in the concept of the unique and inviolate person, on the one hand, and the ethos of our wholly mechanized society which is geared always toward the arbitrary average of the mass, and therewith the implicit collectivization of society, on the other. In the silent clash between these incommensurate elements in our heritage, in the conflict between the social demands of the expanding mass and the traditional rights and prerogatives of the individual, we are following, less deliberately to be sure than Russia, the same path towards social conformity, unification, and co-ordination.

What folly to suppose that an economic system, or even a political system, can make an important difference to this trend! While people argue about ideologies and hunt insidious subversive influences in schools and colleges, the soft, sticky threads entangling us—listed by Mr. Seidenberg—slowly harden into chains. Swift's Gulliver was able by fast talking to get the little people to cut his bonds. But before we can duplicate Gulliver's feat, we shall have to objectivize the mechanisms of our bondage. They are not men nor the evil designs of men: they are our own ignoble ends.

# CHILDREN
# . . . and Ourselves

## OVER ATTENTION—AND LOVING NEGLECT

A RECENT survey undertaken by the University of Michigan Research Center now forms part of the content of a volume titled *Americans View their Mental Health.* This work involved parental attitudes toward children—and towards themselves—in the context of the large amounts of psychological advice received through the mass media—and from psychologists—as to how children should be regarded. The survey found that many of the parents, particularly those who are conventionally well educated and "informed," suffered from confused feelings of inadequacy in their knowledge. The most distressed parents of all were those who spent the most time in recommended introspection—presumably in an attempt to see whether they were making mistakes.

Dorothy Barclay, in the New York *Times* for Feb. 19, comments on the University of Michigan findings:

> . . . the prevalence of self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy among young parents revealed in the study should give serious pause to overly critical critics. The book reports that "problems experienced in the parental role are becoming increasingly defined in psychologically relevant terms."
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> This indicates sensitivity to the subtleties of human interaction that many experts have been working hard to awaken. But the further fact that parent-child problems are frequently experienced as "psychological stress" suggests that psychiatrically sophisticated awareness has some thoroughly unfortunate side-effects.
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> Parental "psychologizing," in the light of the study's findings, seems to be at best a mixed blessing. People interviewed who see themselves in a traditional parental role "tend to find positive satisfaction in children," whereas those who "evaluate their adequacy in terms of the newer parental role—for example, interpersonal warmth or tolerance—tend to express negative or neutral parental satisfaction."

Dr. Bruno Bettelheim in *The Informed Heart*—a book we find ourselves quoting very frequently—shows why such parental attitudes may be harmful as well as confusing. He points out that a large dose of "new psychological knowledge" is apt to catch up with parents before they are ready to handle its challenges, or, in some cases, to correct its unjustifiable air of assertiveness. In a chapter entitled "The Consciousness of Freedom," Dr. Bettelheim writes:

> The educated parent of today who has negative or ambivalent feelings about his child feels quite guilty and wants to do something about it. As likely as not, having to feel guilty about his attitude toward one of his children aggravates the negative feelings, and the child now suffers doubly. In addition to the parent's ambivalence he also suffers now from the parent's annoyance with him for causing pangs of guilt.
>
> Thus having learned that it is bad for one's child to have negative feelings about him, the parent needs a much stronger personality and greater inner security to integrate his guilt. This was not true for yesterday's parent who did not know that his negative feelings could be damaging. He may have been convinced that he did enough by feeding and otherwise providing for the child, about the rest he felt easy in his mind. Now, in order to rid himself of guilt feelings, a parent may even convince himself that the child is defective; that his own negative reactions are based on defects that no one is to blame for. So I face many parents who at other times would have rejected their child and simply left him alone but who now, in order to shake off their sense of guilt, are insisting he is brain damaged, or otherwise defective.

At this point we suddenly bethought ourselves of a passage in one of Agatha Christie's genteel potboilers. Along with her own characteristic delicacy, Mrs. Christie always manages to work in some passages appreciative of the parentally imposed disciplines of an almost bygone era. In this paragraph an experienced governess endeavors to explain a basic fault in the "new psychology":

> "Naturally, in the course of my work, I have seen a good many aspects of the parent-and-child problem. Many children, *most* children, I should say,

> suffer from over-attention on the part of their parents. There is too much love, too much watching over the child. It is uneasily conscious of this brooding, and seeks to free itself, to get away and be unobserved. With an only child this is particularly the case, and, of course, mothers are the worst offenders.
>
> "The best thing for a child, I am convinced, is to have what I should term healthy neglect on the part of both its parents. This happens naturally enough in the case of a large family of children and very little money. They are overlooked because the mother has literally no time to occupy herself with them. They realize quite well that she is fond of them, but they are not worried by too many manifestations of the fact."

Things seem to work out this way in a great many cases. It is not that the "new knowledge"—when it is knowledge—should be withheld, or that it is pernicious. Perhaps the problem is simply that such insights have been mistaken as a substitute for an organic relationship between parent and child—whereas they simply cast a special light on certain aspects of an organic relationship.

Returning to Dr. Bettelheim, we find the following a good summation of this question:

> When the parent simply responds to the more advanced knowledge (that rejection is damaging) and does not move on to achieve inner changes (integrating his guilt; removing the cause for rejection) then scientific advances lead to a deficit instead of the great benefits we can derive from them.
>
> The lesson to be learned from such experiences is again not that we should condemn our new knowledge, but that each step toward greater consciousness—in this case recognition of the potentially damaging nature of some human emotions—requires that much stronger and better integrated a personality before it can represent true progress.

# *FRONTIERS*

## Honor Among Thieves?

SOME readers, perhaps, will recall Salvador De Madariaga's thorny lead piece in the *Saturday Review* for last Nov. 5. In it the writer quotes from Cervantes *(Don Quixote)* to suggest why brigands, if they are successful, practice the moral law within their own community, being undeceived by the common nationalist assumption that underhanded dealings on the part of another national power makes deception among themselves practicable. De Madariaga comments:

> I am, of course, hazarding a parallel between the nation in the world community and the band of brigands in the national community. Let us imagine the communities to which an individual belongs as concentric circles. The individual is the center. The first circle is his family; the second, the group, more or less inchoate, of his acquaintances; the third, the business organism—farm, factory, university—in which he works; the fourth, his city; the fifth, his state; the sixth, his nation; the seventh, his continental group; the eighth, the world community. Why should a moral law be necessary for his life within the first six circles and suddenly stop there? Why should a nation respect justice within its own circle and flout it outside? Remember the advice of the Catalan brigand; justice is indispensable if we are to live in peace. How can we live in peace in the world of nations if the moral law does not apply to the relations between them?
>
> But things are even more complicated than such a geometrical illustration might suggest. The series of concentric circles I have described does not exhaust the groups that have to be considered for our purpose. That series leaves out two important elements: religion and class. These have produced both religious wars and class wars. Throughout her history, Europe has suffered unspeakable horrors that have arisen from these two forms of human aggressiveness. Both class and religion have been invoked as motives to split the world of men into enemy camps; both have obscured the light of reason by bringing men to consider as just whatever suited one side in the war, and as unjust whatever suited the other side.

Generally speaking, we fear that American policy is throughout the world now regarded as including a great number of naïve acts of brigandry on the assumption that America's "defense of democracy" entitles almost any means to justify almost any end. John Crosby's column in the New York *Herald Tribune* for Aug. 23 is both revealing and disturbing on this point, giving perspective on criticism of America at which we need to take a long and honest look. Mr. Crosby writes:

> One cannot spend five minutes in Europe without encountering the immense philosophical difference between Americans and Europeans on the subject of war. In our country, the enemy, the only enemy worth thinking about, is communism. In Europe, the great enemy is war itself.
>
> This is not to say that there are not many who think very much like Americans as expressed in a Gallup Poll. But the difference is that both groups command respectful attention; either group can—in livingrooms, cafés or in the letters columns of newspapers where the subject is constantly hashed over—argue his position without losing friends or his job or his reputation. Can this be done in America? Europeans say no.
>
> The subject, they say—and with great pride—is unarguable in America. "Americans," a witty European said to me, "will kill every last man, woman, and child on earth to defend a liberty they lost long ago. What kind of liberty have Americans? Could any one in America get up and say he thinks the extermination of the human race is the greatest crime of all? Could any American get up and say: 'What's the matter with communism? It's a great system.' All right, you disagree. But what's the matter with that? Must you agree with every word you hear?
>
> "In Europe, when we say freedom of opinion we mean just that. But in America freedom of opinion is freedom to say what every one else is saying. As between that and Russian freedom of opinion, we Europeans don't see much difference. If we can't express an opinion, anyhow, we'd rather be alive and shut our mouths, than dead and have our mouths permanently shut."
>
> We may disagree with that, but we must admit that it would be very difficult for an American to talk like that in any forum you can think of—newspaper, cafe, private home—without being called a Communist dupe or a Communist. Intelligent

> Europeans feel that the stakes in the next war are so vast that this issue should be discussed on the very highest levels. If humanity doesn't perish, civilization almost certainly will. Is this not an arguable subject?
>
> We must not crucify every one who feels this greatest of issues should be thrashed out publicly, because it includes some of our best friends and it includes some very great democrats.
>
> Says my witty European friend: "I would like to see a big television debate in America: 'Is communism a better way of life than democracy?' If you can't argue about democracy, you haven't got it."

Of course, one can argue that Crosby as well as De Madariaga is inclined to take too "intellectual" an approach, and that what we need are more tough men who accept the reality that men are forever embattled everywhere and are determined to do the best for their own community. We seem to recall that General Patton was of this breed and you can, if you wish, express a preference for his sentiments. Here are some examples of the simple, "gutty" stuff for which the general was famous as his Third Army was rolling across France with superior fire- and manpower:

> We don't want yellow cowards in this army. They should be killed off like rats. If not, they will go back home after the war and breed more cowards. The brave man will breed more brave men. Kill off the goddamn cowards and we'll have a nation of brave men!
>
> Americans love to fight, traditionally. All real Americans love the sting and clash of battle. When you here, every man jack of you, were kids, you all admired the champion marble player, the fastest runner, the handiest kid with his fists, the big league ball players, the All-American football players. Americans love a winner. Americans will not tolerate a loser. Americans despise cowards. Americans play to win all the time and every time. I wouldn't give a hoot in hell for a man who lost and laughed. That's why Americans have never lost nor will ever lose a war, for the very thought of losing is hateful to an American.

The attraction of opposites makes us turn from Gen. Patton to Robert M. Hutchins on the recent occasion of his sixtieth birthday. Asked for his present opinions, Mr. Hutchins said he was still in favor of thought: "The biggest enemy of human progress is mental indolence. As Aristotle said, 'Learning is accompanied by pain.' Too many people won't go through that pain." If we are not willing to endure the pain which accompanies modification of comfortable opinions, we are simply not ready for any discussions on a truly international basis. We have to accord Mr. Crosby's European friend some respect when he says that in America, as in Russia, "it is treasonable to have anything but the official opinion." The punishment for treason may be considerably different in degree, but it is the attitude of punishment itself in purging dissenters which makes it so difficult to substantiate the claim that free discussion is integral to our present democracy.