

THE REVOLT OF THE GHOSTS

BY EUGENE LYONS

THE catastrophe did not make itself felt at once. It seemed, rather, a creeping paralysis that crippled first one organ of the body social, then another. Strange silences began to blot out the chatter of the radio stations. A leprosy of blank space broke out in newspapers and magazines. The most garrulous of our statesmen, politicians, patriots and viewers-with-alarm were suddenly struck speechless. Mysterious hiatuses developed in every department of national affairs.

And soon all life seemed disjointed and inarticulate. The public reaction to the encroaching paralysis was also queer. In the initial days of the revolt people were more curious than depressed. You might hear someone remark casually:

"Funny, ain't it, Dr. Blah's sermons stopped in the papers?"

"That so? And my favorite news commentator, you know, that guy Bill Hall, didn't show up on the air this week."

"I'll be doggoned if it don't

begin to look like an epidemic," a third might add. "Only one of the five speakers at our monthly symposium on war and peace showed up on Wednesday!"

"Strange, neighbor, strange!"

But slowly the puzzlement turned to bewilderment, then to a species of panic. Often enough we had heard of the impending "collapse of civilization." That sort of talk was fashionable. But people had discounted the phrase for the threadbare cliché that it was. Now, suddenly, it seemed a macabre reality. Civilization did seem groggy, fever-eyed and more than a little delirious. Its accustomed voice of unction had turned to an idiot stutter, or what was worse — oppressive silence.

Then the whole country, the whole world, began to understand what had happened. The ghosts had revolted!

From dank cellars and dizzy penthouses, inglorious holes and palatial studies, the denizens of ghostland poured into the open, blinking eyes unaccustomed to

light, shrieking their protests in voices unused to anything above a whisper.

The ghosts had revolted! By hundreds and by thousands they ripped their shrouds of anonymity. They shed their humility. They kicked their typewriters into corners and rushed madly into the streets, from ghosts of highest rank even unto the lowliest ghost to a ghost's ghost. The galley slaves of intellect. The underworld of creative expression. The hobgoblins of thought and speech. The artificers of ready-made and custom-made sentiments. The skilled taxidermists of lifelike statesmen. The carvers of figureheads. The ventriloquists of patriotism, eloquence, high ideals, mock emotions. The whole universe of shadows, echoes and essences suddenly bodied forth in angry men and women, protesting, demanding and defying.

It took time before the full horror of the defiance was grasped by the people. Everyday illusions and delusions went pop! pop! pop! Inflated reputations began to explode. Stuffed shirts caved in. The ghosts were throwing the ancient burdens off their meek, rounded backs, and the clatter of falling dignities and crumbling fame was like thunder through the land.

II

The mass meeting of insurgent ghosts at Madison Square Garden is vivid in my memory despite the years that have passed. Banners, floats, speeches and excitement, the awareness of similar gatherings in every center of the nation — and permeating it all, the feeling of an entire civilization teetering on the brink.

As I entered the hall, a shrill voice was sprinkling words through clusters of loud-speakers overhead and the close-packed ghosts were stirred to applause by his haranguing. The speaker was a diminutive, bald-headed, spectacled man in baggy clothes, his physical insignificance underlined by the floodlights in which he seemed to swim. His words sounded to me like wild insanities, though in the following months such statements and claims became commonplace and generally accepted.

"The public," the little man was shouting, "our dear beloved public, thought they were voting for Thomas T. Tinhorn last November when they elected him President of the United States. It's about time they knew the truth. We're finished with hypocrisy, hokum and legerdemain! I proclaim it here before the sovereign voters of

our great country who are listening in on the radio. I proclaim it before you, my embattled fellow-ghosts. I proclaim it before the world and before history!

"It was not Thomas T. Tinhorn the voters chose as President. It was me, me, me — Lucius Z. Pinwinkle they elected! Those were *my* speeches the President recited, *my* sentiments, *my* slogans. By every right Lucius Z. Pinwinkle and his staff of subcontractor ghosts" — he motioned and eight men and women took a bow — "should be chief executive of the United States."

While applause rolled through the great hall, I looked around and soon began to distinguish some of the banners and delegations. Nearby was a group whom I mistook at first glance for a galaxy of motion picture stars, but their banners set me right. I learned that they were merely Doubles and Stand-Ins for Movie Stars, Local 348 of the Ghosts' Alliance. Inscribed in huge white letters on red bunting over their heads was the legend: "We take the chances — they take the checks!"

An entire section of the vast gathering place was given over to the Celebrated Names or First Person Singular Division. Among my yellowed notes of that bizarre

meeting I still have the words I copied from a large chart, in the shape of a phonograph record, set up behind the section: *By X . . . Himself! His Own Story! By the Heavyweight Champion! How I Did It! From the Death Cell! By America's Sweetheart! By the Quintuplets Themselves!* Over, under and to either side of this list of ironical exclamations one lone word was repeated in giant letters: "YEAH?"

The central portion of the Garden, of course, was given over to the speech writers, since they were the most numerous — the proletariat of ghostdom, as it were. From the placards I judged that they were deployed on both sides of the center aisle in accordance with their specialties: after-dinner persiflage, political harangues, Rotarian routines, canned lectures, sermons by the yard, debates to measure, addresses of acceptance, funeral orations, memorial grandiloquence, captain-of-industry prophecy, stuffed-shirt noises, legislator and statesman stuff, speeches from remnants and left-overs — in short, the artisans of oratory grouped according to their particular jobs.

Another speaker had by now succeeded Mr. Pinwinkle at the microphone. Immersed in the white light, he seemed frightened and

spoke nervously. As he proceeded, however, mounting indignation erased his fears and he achieved a measure of real eloquence.

"Like all of you, fellow workers," I remember him saying, "I have written scores and hundreds of speeches for all occasions and many of them have been used over and over again for years. But this is the first time that I have delivered a speech myself. I have spoken through the mouths of governors and ward heelers, evangelists and bank presidents, big-time businessmen and national heroes, lady philanthropists and women's club secretaries. At last, at last, I speak with my own mouth!"

A sort of elation haloed his head at these words. A burst of applause and shouts of "Attaboyle!" gave him a chance to wipe the perspiration under his chin.

"You will understand, I am sure, if I find myself a little tongue-tied and excited. Year after year I have listened to myself in voices ranging from tinny soprano to rumbling basso. It is like a blessed release, oh my fellow-ghosts, to hear my own voice!

"The distress of the audiences," he continued, "is as nothing compared to the torments you and I have suffered when our addresses were delivered. How often have I

squirmed in my seat while my favorite sentences were being mangled by an orator who didn't begin to understand what he was talking about. How often have I just barely saved myself from apoplexy by digging my nails into my palms when the speaker skipped entire lines of mine, even entire pages, while neither he nor his listeners were aware of it. I have bitten my lips to blood as college presidents mispronounced my choicest words and scattered their emphasis in precisely the wrong places, despite the fact that I had underlined the proper places. Only you and I know what it means to have our speeches misinterpreted. We are like composers who must hear their works played by a tyro.

"I know you are with me in the basic demand that speakers be expected to understand every word, every figure of speech in his oration!" Vociferous approval from the embattled ghosts. "We demand that penalties be fixed for speakers who repeatedly take the wrong manuscript along and make the wrong oration!" More noisy approval. "We demand that credit for the ghost writer be given by chairmen and on printed programs for all speeches!"

The next address — an earnest, emotional outburst that moved the

great gathering nearly to tears — was delivered by the well-known operator of a gag factory. He spoke feelingly for his brethren of the jokesmiths' guild, in their endless travail of humor, wringing new laughs from the most sapless material for radio comedians and screen clowns.

"Day after day and year after year," he exclaimed, "we must feed the public's appetite for laughs. The whole human race has become for us just a glum spectator daring us to find his funny-bone. We wear down our minds, we fight and steal and go ga-ga to find ever more puns, more wise-cracks, more insane exaggerations. But who gets the credit for our efforts and our sacrifices? Who gets the cash for our sad and exacting labor? Some radio or movie star or columnist who couldn't invent a gag or a joke to save his life! Is that fair play? Is it democracy?"

From the Gagsters in the galleries came cries of "No, no, a thousand times no!"

Other spokesmen at the mass meeting detailed the complaints of secretaries and public relations counsel who write the business reports signed by corporation heads; of the ghosts in fiction mills; of the autobiographers of well-

heeled nonentities; of the composers of New Year's messages for public men and women; of the denizens of ghost sweatshops; of all those who write and compose and prophesy and exhort under other people's signatures. The impassioned speech of a delegate of the True Story Stooges, in particular, sticks in my mind.

"The chairman," he said, "introduced me as Lemuel G. Smith. But before you stands a man with more aliases than a Russian revolutionist ever had. Before you stands a reformed streetwalker many times over, an international crook who saw the evil of his ways, a high school girl whose fate it is to be dragged through slimy temptations by designing men at least once a month, a parson untrue to his holy trust, a murderer who tells all before he pays with his life.

"On every news-stand in the land I have bared my careers as a spy, a whore, a gigolo, a two-timing mamma, a dope fiend, a confidence man. I have been a kept woman for the confession pulps so often that I am ashamed to look my wife and kids in the face. I have been a kleptomaniac and a forger and a society dame gone wrong so repeatedly that I shrink from contact with decent folk. At this very moment my orgiastic past, illus-

trated realistically too, is for sale in the lobby. I cringed as I passed it. I have been confessing sins for a salary so long that the mere sight of a personal pronoun gives me the heebie-jeebies. The unexpected rattle of a door or window sends me scampering and I run at the sight of a policeman.

"But why say more? You all know how I feel. I hate to go off this platform, it is so good to appear in public in my true colors as a hard-working and respectable citizen without an illustrated orgy to his credit — in my own name, as Lemuel G. Smith. Be it ever so humble there is no name like your own."

From Madison Square Garden the ghosts marched in a body to City Hall under banners demanding more credit and more cash. The city fathers, haggard and unkempt as a result of the ordeal, greeted them from the steps of the building, greeted them with despairing gestures and said not a word: their ghosts, too, had revolted.

III

All of this is history now, and only a few of us eyewitnesses are still alive. I, for one, despair of the attempt to convey to a new generation the psychological terror of

those months. One must have lived through the ominous era of the Revolt of the Ghosts to appreciate the overtones of horror as the machinery of everyday life stalled and the foundations of civilization began to wobble. It is a matter of record that three-quarters of all the current magazines suspended publication for lack of material during the revolt. The Congressional Record shrank to a mere shadow of its obese self. The lecture business collapsed. The radio net-works, the vaudeville stage, journalism, the mighty flood of words, sentiments, tunes, jokes and advice sank to a mere trickle. The tabloid papers just lay down and died.

When, at last, the revolt was ended and the ghosts were back at their jobs, and the wheels of civilized existence began to turn once more, we found ourselves, it seemed, in a new world — fresher, more straightforward, less pretentious. The elaborate make-believe had been shattered forever and the terrible constrictions of routine hypocrisy were relaxed. The role of the ghosts had been a clandestine, dishonest, inhibiting force. Now it was in the open, recognized and respected and remunerated, without the need for bluff and sleight-of-hand and hoaxes.

Thus it has remained ever since. The employment of ghosts has become not merely respectable but well-nigh obligatory. A man worth his salt today has his ghost as naturally and publicly as he has his secretary. A statesman or big businessman nowadays will no more admit writing his own speeches or reports than doing his own laundry. We all remember the scandal evoked by the rumor that Senator Jippy writes his own speeches and articles. It aroused organized labor and cost him the nomination for the Presidency. The line "Words by So-and-So" is

now on every program or announcement of speeches, and the notation "Ghosted by So-and-So" appears on every article, interview, statement or other public expression. In fact, many of the more successful ghosts now hire celebrated names to sign their stuff, paying them the small percentage permitted by the Ghosts' Alliance Code.

It is not saying too much, surely, to credit the Revolt of the Ghosts with purging our modern civilization.

(This article ghosted by the Eveready Editorial Corp.)

FATHER COUGHLIN'S CATECHISM

(Excerpted from a quiz aiming at "education and increased knowledge" in Social Justice for September 23.)

What is the real purpose of England's war against Germany?

Answer: Preservation of a gold-based international money system.

How would you describe the Government of England as of July 1, 1940?

Answer: Marxian Socialist.

What is the principal reason for the continued success of Naziism in Germany? *Answer:* Its theory that every German works for the benefit of the German people as a whole.

How do modern capitalism and communism resemble each other?

Answer: Both are opposed to private ownership of property.

What prominent American has recently stood "head and shoulders" over all others for national defense and against war hysteria?

Answer: Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh.

► *A psychiatrist diagnoses this
mad world and concludes that*

INTOLERANCE IS A FORM OF INSANITY

BY LOUIS BERG, M.D.

RECENTLY a rabid street-corner preacher of race hatred in New York named Joseph McWilliams was committed to Bellevue Hospital by a magistrate for observation by psychiatrists. Bellevue adjudged him sane, but the court's instinct in the matter finds ready scientific justification. The courts, indeed, would have done well to recommend similar observation of the handful of young men, arrested earlier on information provided by the FBI, who had apparently played with grandiose schemes to annihilate persons whose blood or views they considered a "menace." To the layman the rantings of such young men may seem only additional fantasies in a time replete with the fantastic. But to the professional eye of the psychiatrist these are episodes with implications beyond the limits of jurisprudence or politics. They are to him further symptoms of the rising tide of madness beating against the dikes of sanity in a tormented and nerve-strained world.

The word "madness" is used

rhetorically by journalists and statesmen in discussing the way of the world in our generation. The psychiatrist, watching developments from his professional angle, uses the word literally. He recognizes in the behavior of groups tell-tale symptoms of mental derangement of the sort he deals with daily among his own patients in their homes, in hospitals, and occasionally in padded cells. The groups range from tiny societies of "plotters" and self-appointed "saviors" to entire national régimes and international movements. But the manifestations of their insanity, whether mild or virulent, conform to the behavior patterns known to psychiatry. The symptoms are clearly defined and may be diagnosed. The fact that the maniacal movements are shaping history makes the picture tragic, but does not affect its truth. The psychiatrist cannot help looking upon much of the news of our times as cumulative clinical evidence.

The delusions which spur on the power-politicians and their follow-