

## Harvard's Tallest Tale

It is suggestive of the rich times in which we dwell that America's preeminent boomer of socialism, egalitarianism, and an end to hypocrisy in high places, is a millionaire economist and *bon vivant*, an erstwhile Harvard prof who winters in the Alps midst the rich and the powerful. When at home, he upbraids "the Establishment" for an honorarium that would make Norman Thomas blush, occasionally harangues defenseless students, and otherwise devotes himself to huckstering flyblown treatises that are snickered at by all serious economists even as they are snatched up as Book-of-the-Month Club selections.

In a time of shifting gullibility and evolving delusions I take the forty-year dance of Dr. John Kenneth Galbraith as solid evidence that there is a Heavenly Father who deeply cares for his struggling children here on the good ship earth. Had Dr. Galbraith not forsaken an Iona Station, Ontario, dung heap some four decades ago for a cosmetic Ph. D. at Berkeley, America would be bereft of one of the most obvious and entertaining mountebanks since Aimee Semple McPherson or Gerald L.K. Smith. This would be a sad loss, for Dr. Galbraith is a stunning exemplification of what Lewis Lapham calls the Great Trick; he has managed to turn himself and all that he discharges into a highly lucrative commodity. Mailer has done it. The slob Warhol has done it. But Galbraith is one of the few academics who have managed it. More than anyone else Galbraith exemplifies the changed conditions of modern America. The Tennessee rube of yore has been replaced by the demi-educated sophisticate. Peruna bows out to Valium and health foods; and the fluent honey-fogler who once worked the hill-apes of Arkansas now gets fat and mellow on the earnest intellectualoid. Yesterday's yokel forked up his discretionary income for relief from bodily groans and spiritual fright; the intellectualoid looks to the likes of Dr. Galbraith and so has his fantasies nourished and his soul well-greased.

Now to mark Dr. Galbraith down as a mountebank is admittedly to rattle the china, for he is admired by many of the Republic's most eminent minds. Through the years his intellectual circle has included such luminous figures as Eugene McCarthy, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., George McGovern, Angie Dickinson, you name it. Anyone ever thrown into a Kennedy swimming pool has at one time or another come under his spell, and to show him a discourtesy is to play with fire. The old wizard's energies are legendary, and his personal charm brings to mind

Beatrice Webb at the height of her powers.

Shortly after his friend and patron, John F. Kennedy, was murdered, Dr. Galbraith made the healing gesture of declaring, "We let the right inject this poison into the American blood stream and this is the result." It is a remark worth remembering, for it conveys not only Dr. Galbraith's magisterial sense of his own power, but also his sense of fair play. Moreover it suggests a major quality of his mind, that is, his ability instantly to abolish the truth in the service of the most highly ideologized absurdity. Think of it, President Kennedy lies dead, the only evidence available suggests that the assassin was a self-proclaimed Marxist and Castro sympathizer, and already Dr. Galbraith has grasped what would ultimately become the intellectualoid's solemn belief, to wit, that Kennedy fell to a rightist plot. Instinctively he understands how the intellectualoid's mind rebels at mere facts in a rush to embrace the inverted insight. His is a rare talent, and that it operates so unhesitatingly and so unerringly even in time of sudden tragedy, marks it as rarer still.

### One Hand Clapping

This immunity to the facts and this sure sense of the gullibility of his audience have become characteristic of his work and have made him a rich man. Yet Dr. Galbraith's life has not been all sauce and glory. True he has made a tidy fortune, but through it all he has had to endure the relentless prejudice and harassment of a dedicated band of small-minded men, the professional economists. Starting with the Keynesians and ending with the Friedmanites, they have all treated him unflatteringly. It is a mark of his incomparable achievement that—though no important economist accepts one of his books or any of his theories—John Kenneth Galbraith stands today as the most widely recognized economist in the country, perhaps the world. He is to economics what Harold Robbins is to the novel. The story of how he overcame the economists' narrow-minded assaults on his scholarship could inspire a whole generation of Clifford Irvings.

Apparently at the outset of his career the economists sought to sink him by a conspiracy of silence, for up to 1952 he was one of the least discussed scholars laboring at that gloomy science. He had written three books, all of which by his own admission had failed to have any impact at all. Professionally speaking, he was the sound of one hand clapping. But only if you have been in the deepest valley can you

ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain, and Dr. Galbraith now yearned for that mountain. In a manifesto that today takes on great significance he vowed that he "would not be ignored.... From now on I would put in an extra year on the writing to engage a larger audience, and because of that the other economists would have to react to me."

What a difference a year makes was shown in his very next book, *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power*. It sold over 100,000 copies. Now the great man had his wider audience. Unfortunately he had also provoked the economists to react. They hooted him down for claiming that industrial concentrations stimulate the growth of large labor concentrations, and they threw in the *coup de grâce* by pointing to the coal and trucking industries, two loosely concentrated industries famous for their powerfully concentrated unions. They flayed him for his notion that giant union, giant industry, and giant government all countervail against one another, checking each other's potential abuse of power. It was patently absurd to believe that the three have different interests when, as George Stigler pointed out, all three may very well develop a common interest in fleecing the consumer.

The publication of *American Capitalism* marked a crucial turning point in Dr. Galbraith's career. It contained no research at all, and while economists were delayed by testing his hypotheses, the book became a best seller with those whose ears fill with sirens every time economic questions arise. By the time the economists began stoning him, Dr. Galbraith had assured himself the professorial equivalent of the guaranteed income; the book had made the bibliographies of introductory social science courses everywhere. The lesson was not lost on the great man, and from that point on, not one of his books would be enfeebled by documentation.

The bombardment that Dr. Galbraith has endured from the Republic's economics departments is eminently well-deserved, but often Adam Smith's progeny grow unruly, dismissing him as a devotee of alchemy or the Lysenko of economics, and resorting to ribaldry too coarse to quote to nonacademic company. Here they go too far, for Dr. Galbraith's habit of ignoring facts and delivering up unsupportable asseverations has constituted a very positive contribution to the study of economics: In attracting mobs of outraged economists he has stimulated a huge amount of scholarly work. This was notably

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*Jean-François Revel*

## **A Note on Eurocommunism**

*There is no such thing as Eurocommunism.  
There is only Italocommunism.*

Two expressions have recently entered with perturbing effect into Western political commentary: "historical compromise" and "Eurocommunism." The first has a legitimate birth and father, Enrico Berlinguer, leader of the most important of the Communist parties functioning in democratic nations; it dates from the fall of 1973. The second expression, whose origins are bourgeois and anonymous, appeared in 1975. It was not conceived by the Communists, but the contagious force of its immediate success quickly caused them to adopt it. Enrico Berlinguer first used it in a public speech in June 1976 in Paris, during a turbulent joint rally of French and Italian Communists.

What general impression does the public get from the surprising repudiations and declarations that make up the offer of the historical compromise and Eurocommunism, also known as neo-communism? What the Western Communist chiefs would like the citizens of their countries to be convinced of by their new line comes down to two main ideas. In foreign affairs, the Western Communist parties say they have become independent of Moscow; at home, they henceforth accept democracy, pluralism in political parties, and those basic freedoms that in Marxist-Leninist tradition had always been dismissed contemptuously as "formal." In short, they promise not to take power unless they win it by universal suffrage, to respect the rights of their opponents while they hold it, and to surrender it if they are beaten in an election.

Thus proclaiming themselves purged of their Stalinist essence, the Western Communist parties offer their candidacy for normal participation in political responsibilities, "normal" meaning compatible with the rotation of different majorities in power without the risk of an irreversible and authoritarian change of regime. In fact, since the Second World War, the exercise of power in countries with a strong Communist party has been radically warped by the anomaly of opposition without alternation in office. In France and Italy especially, the Communist parties can achieve considerable electoral success, but an invisible barrier stands between them and power: For to give them power would amount to taking a one-way ticket for an unknown social system that perhaps would be managed from Moscow. That invisible barrier also blocks the route to power for those who are too intimately allied with the Communists.

Are the Communists of Western Europe sincere in their recent profession of faith in democracy? Since for sixty years they have practiced deceit and the sudden reversal of the party line all over

the world, we have the right to be particularly skeptical in their case. And yet, strangely enough, doubting their honesty is today viewed in the West as being in poor taste (not just in Europe, but among political science practitioners in the United States and Canada). Not to believe them is said to amount to "a return to the cold war." In this sense, the Communists have already won the psychological battle, and in any event their democratic overture is a perfect public relations operation.

What can we say with certainty about neo-communism, if we judge it on its performance?

A first observation is that no Communist party has ever democratized power, when it held power, in the country in which it held it. Furthermore, on the only occasion in the West when a Communist party had the opportunity to offer solid proof of its good will by participating in the construction of a pluralist democracy—the case of Portugal—the Communist minority (about 10-12 percent of the vote) used illegal and violent methods in an all-out attempt to win total power. Those socialist regimes, like Algeria, which though not Communist follow the principles of economic collectivism also seem unable to do without a totalitarian political organization. Communist promises to respect democratic methods in the exercise of power have to this date never been put to the test. Those promises emanate from Communist parties which have never held power, or at least not enough power to eliminate other political forces.

Yet the will of the Western Communists to be independent of Moscow seems authentic. It is not new among the Italians, but rarely has it been as clearly stated as it was by Berlinguer in his speeches to the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1976 in Moscow, and to the summit conference of European Communist parties in East Berlin in June. Among the French, by contrast, it is very recent. It dates from the fall of 1975 and, as always with them, it took the form of a sudden shift. The recognition of the right to autonomy in "national ways" to achieve socialism and the rejection of the "single Soviet model" were clearly affirmed, against the desires of Moscow ideologues like Mikhail Suslov and contrary to the wishes of Leonid Brezhnev, in whose mind this summit, so laboriously prepared for two years, was to confirm the authority and the primacy of the Soviet Communist party over all others. It was a serious setback for the Soviets, so much so that the Soviet press printed expurgated versions of the speeches of the Western Communist leaders and of the final statement, eliminating the most heretical passages, so that the people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe remain unaware that Moscow is no longer the capital of world or even European Communism and that its regime is challenged in the West by the Communists themselves. (1) But the seeking of

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