



John Samuels

AFGHANISTAN: THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE LIVES!

... with the tacit support of the American Coolhead community.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 marked a turning point in the Cold War: it was the first time since World War II that Russian troops—not simply Russian advisers—entered a country that did not belong to the Warsaw Pact. So argues Gérard Chaliand in *Report from Afghanistan*.^{*} Written in 1981, Chaliand's book is less important for the information it provides on the current struggle in Afghanistan than for the author's analysis of the significance of the Soviet invasion, a significance that the West by and large has been loath to realize. On last October 20th the *New York Times Magazine* ran a story about an American journalist's travels among the Afghan freedom fighters at the same time it ran a story about a feminist's despair that women of the postfeminist generation are not nearly so exercised about "the woman's question" as she is. No doubt because the *Times* assumed, probably correctly, that its readership is more interested in the struggle between men and "liberated" women than in the struggle of the Afghans to be liberated from the Soviet Union, it chose the feminist's autobiographical meanderings as the cover story.

This is not to say the war in Afghanistan has not been covered by the American press. From time to time a story crops up in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*—rarely on the front page—about how the Afghan freedom fighters are doing, but events in Afghanistan have not received the press coverage given to the events in Poland. To some degree, this is understandable. Poland is accessible, Afghanistan is not. Not only is it difficult and dangerous for reporters to go to Afghanistan, but once they get there they don't

necessarily come up with a good story. For the freedom fighters cannot schedule battles to provide exciting copy for visiting journalists. A protracted struggle waged over an enormous expanse of generally desolate territory, the war in Afghanistan is often a very dull affair that gives reporters little in the way of hard news.

The relative inattention is understandable for other reasons as well. Western journalists cannot travel in the urban areas of Afghanistan because they are held by the Russians, who feel no obligation to let them snoop around and find out how repressive and savage they have been. As Ben Wattenberg has said: "Communist countries can wage long, brutal wars and pay very little for them. . . . After all, if you can't get television cameras into a country to witness the poison gas, the dead

civilians, the maimed children—then what can you show on television? No access; no horror." Are the Russians winning—or, more likely, terrorizing—the hearts and minds of the people in Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar? Who knows?

But even if Afghanistan were more accessible, it is doubtful that the Western press would rush to cover the war. The country is simply not of compelling interest to the West. In the United States there are few Afghan-Americans, and it is difficult for Americans and Europeans to take an interest in a people who seem, in their strange clothes and peculiar beliefs, to belong to another world. The West may coo over the freedom fighters' bravery, but does it not think that their courage derives from an allegiance to Islamic fundamentalism? From an allegiance to a way of life that is backward, xenophobic, and intolerant of change? The subhead of the *Times Magazine* article suggests as much, for it speaks not of freedom fighters but of "Moslem guerrillas"—that is, men of the same fanatical spirit as Khomeini's hordes. This view of the freedom fighters is unfair, since many of them reject Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, it is not a total distortion, for one of the major resistance factions is headed by Gulbudin Hekmatyar, an admirer of Khomeini. And, according to Chaliand, Gulbudin "is generally considered the most intelligent, ambitious, and ruthless resistance leader in Peshawar."

Torn between admiration for the extraordinary courage of the freedom fighters and distaste for their Islamic traditionalism, the West has offered them an ounce of sympathy and a pound of indifference, wistfully hoping that Afghanistan will become the Soviet Union's Vietnam. This mixture appeals to many foreign policy experts, who argue that there is little the West can do to influence events in Afghanistan—indeed, that to attempt to do more than give a weak cheer from the



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sidelines might, as an observer wrote in a 1980 issue of *Foreign Policy*, "be the policy least likely to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan." Providing weapons, he argued, might provoke the Soviets to put more time and effort into subduing the Afghans, thereby making a political solution more difficult. Providing weapons might also encourage the Soviet Union to invade Northern Pakistan, which harbors many Afghan refugees and provides a base of support for the freedom fighters.

Many observers also argue that the Soviet Union has a "privileged interest" in Afghanistan because of its fear of being encircled by hostile powers—fear also that the fires of Islamic traditionalism might spread to the Soviet side of the border and Soviet Muslims might begin to entertain dangerous ideas about gaining their freedom. Finally, many argue that it is extremely unrealistic to assume the Soviet Union would allow Afghanistan, which the Communists took over in 1978, to become a non-Communist state. To support their point they cite the Brezhnev doctrine (which presumably will survive its teacher): once a Communist state, always a Communist state. These observers don't quite justify the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, but they generally accept the Soviet Union's own line that the invasion is a marginal issue of little concern to the West. The situation is unfortunate, they argue, but to aid the freedom fighters is only to prolong their agony.

The debate about Afghanistan, of course, cannot be separated from the larger debate about the West's relations with the Soviet Union. It should be clear that none of the participants in this debate regards the Soviet Union as a decent and progressive country. In other words the debate is not between anti-Communists and pro-Communists but between anti-Communists and anti-anti-Communists. The anti-anti-Communists, who include opponents of aid to the Afghan freedom fighters, accuse anti-Communists of pursuing a foreign policy that is moralistic, not realistic. These anti-anti-Communists, we might say, consider themselves Coolheads whose approach to the Soviet Union offers the best chance of preventing world war and making the Soviet Union less adventurous in its foreign policy. The most famous Coolheads are George Ball, Cyrus Vance, and George Kennan. At the recent dedication of the W. Averell Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union at Columbia University, Vance warned that "to embrace a policy of continuing confrontation . . . is to confuse firmness with bellicosity, which can only heighten tension, increase the risk of war and strengthen the repressive tendencies within the Soviet Union at a time of transition in Soviet leadership."

The Coolheads' main concern is to reassure the Soviet leaders that the West's

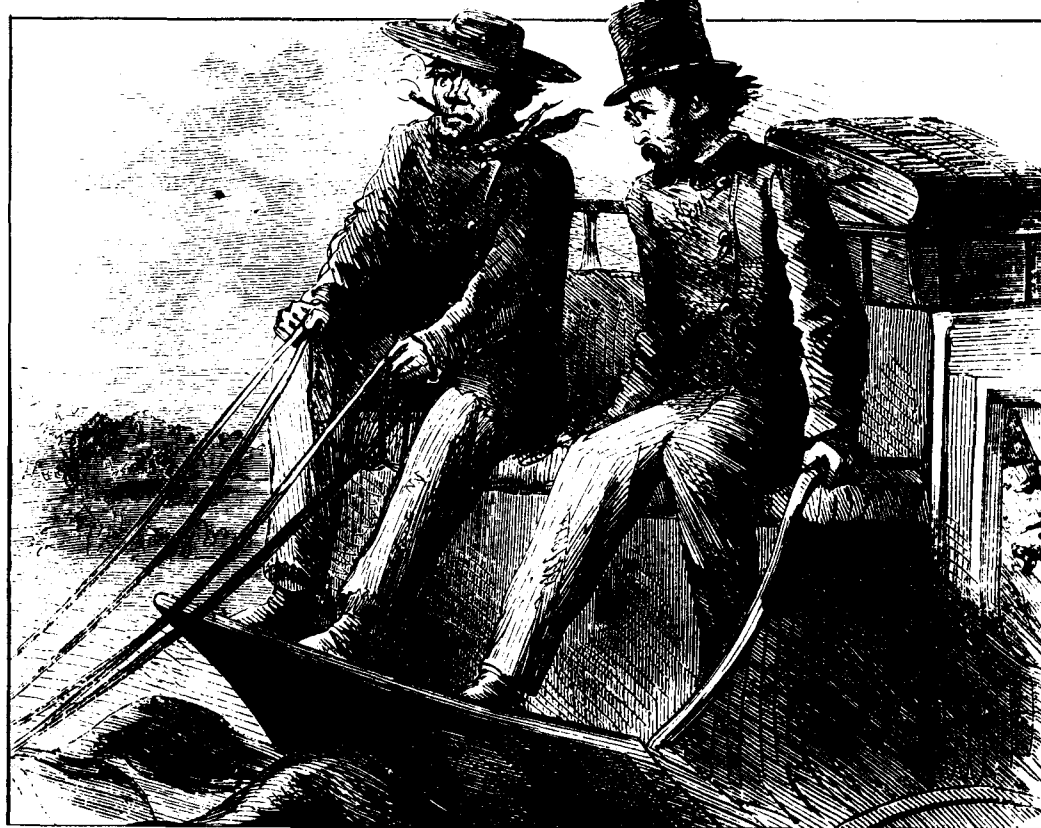
intentions are benign. It is essential, Vance said, "that we leave no room for doubt in the minds of the present and future leaders of the Soviet Union, that the option of moving toward a less dangerous and more constructive future relationship is open." The key word in the intellectual baggage of the Coolheads is reassurance. Since the Soviet leaders are obsessed with national security, the West must persuade them that it has no interest in undermining the Soviet empire. If the West succeeds in persuading them, the Coolheads argue, then the "doves" in the Kremlin will prevail and détente will flourish once more.

The key word in the intellectual baggage of the anti-Communists, who include not only Chaliand but also such people as Raymond Aron, Jean-François Revel, Theodore Draper, and Walter Laqueur, is reciprocity, not reassurance. The Soviet Union must be held accountable for its adventurous foreign policy. As Walter Laqueur and Charles Krauthammer have said, "The response to pressure has to be counterpressure, the response to positive moves and initiatives has to be made in a similar spirit." These writers are utterly impatient with the notion that Soviet foreign policy can be explained by Soviet paranoia. According to Aron, "The idea that Moscow wants nothing more than security convinces no one but blind men and fools." And, of course, they refuse to accept the sanctity of the Brezhnev doctrine. "There is no more reason to acknowledge irreversibility in Afghanistan or Poland than there is in Cuba or El Salvador," noted Draper.

The anti-Communists accuse the Coolheads of wishful thinking in assuming words of reassurance will cause the Soviet Union to become more dove-ish. The Soviet Union, Chaliand reminds us, "has not given up its efforts to expand its

empire." It is expansionist not because of its paranoia, but because the logic of its system dictates continual expansion. Not only does the ideology of Marxism-Leninism call for it, but the success of the Soviet Union as an expansionist power proves the worth of the ideology. That is, the legitimacy of the Communist Party—the ruling class—is based upon Marxism-Leninism. If Marxism-Leninism were to fail in the world arena as it so obviously has in the domestic arena, then it would be difficult for the Soviet ruling class to justify its privileged position. As it is, the Soviet leadership can admit to domestic shortages yet point with pride to the fact that the Soviet Union has become a great world power, one that is feared by all countries, including the United States. And who is to say that the average Soviet worker, while grumbling about the poor food and poor housing, does not find solace in his country's military and geopolitical achievements? The anti-Communists thus argue that the Soviet Union will continue to expand until its leaders decide that the cost of further expansion is too great. It is not reassurance but reciprocity that will make the doves prevail in the Kremlin.

The anti-Communists also argue that a policy of reassurance can only increase the danger of war. By sending misleading signals to the Soviet Union that the West will always remain passive in the face of Soviet expansionism, the policy of reassurance increases the possibility of Soviet miscalculation. Thus the anti-Communists are engaged not so much in a quest to extirpate the evil of Communism as to convince Western leaders that Soviet expansionism will be curtailed only when the West builds up sufficient conventional forces. Reciprocity obviously cannot work unless the West is a credible military power.



History, T.S. Eliot says in "Gerontion," is a "cunning corridor," and there is no reason to assume the anti-Communist approach is any more realistic than the Coolhead one. But let us look at the evidence. The Soviet Union has always been an expansionist power, adding since World War II alone not only most of Eastern Europe to its empire but also creating client states in Cuba, Ethiopia, Angola, South Yemen, and Vietnam. In a recent issue of the *New York Review of Books*, a former Vietcong official who has come to hate the regime in Hanoi writes: "Vietnam is now practically an instrument of Soviet expansionism in Southeast Asia. There are at least 10,000 Soviet advisers in Vietnam today. Since joining Comecon in June 1978, Vietnam has steadily become an integral part of the Soviet system. . . ." He also argues that because of "the support and military power of the Soviet Union, Hanoi has the will and also the means of exporting the revolution beyond the borders of Indochina when conditions permit." In the 1970s the United States and the West in general pursued a policy of reassurance—promoting détente, cutting military budgets, signing the Helsinki Accords. The Soviet Union reciprocated by pursuing an expansionist foreign policy and engaging in a tremendous military buildup.

Can we not conclude, then, that the West's policy of reassurance encouraged Soviet adventurousness? Yet there is a weak link in this argument. If the Soviet Union wanted to keep the West on its path of reassurance, why did it invade Afghanistan? An indirect result of the invasion has been the election of several Western governments driven more by anti-Communism than by anti-anti-Communism. Quite clearly the Soviet leaders decided that more would be gained from the invasion than lost. The invasion would

show the world that they were a credible ally, that they would not back out of their commitments. No matter that not only the Afghan people but also the Communist leader of Afghanistan at that time—Hafizullah Amin—did not want Soviet troops on Afghan soil. No matter that Amin, who as head of the government supposedly invited the Russian troops to Afghanistan in order to repel foreign aggression, was promptly executed. The transparent falsity of their justifications was only a minor embarrassment to Soviet leaders, who know the world understands actions better than words. By invading Afghanistan they were telling the world, especially the Third World, that they were not going to let a country slide out of their hands once they had it in their grip.

In short, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan less out of paranoia about national security than to impress their own people that Marxism-Leninism still works and to intimidate the rest of the world. Moreover, by invading Afghanistan the Soviet Union positioned itself to gain access to the Persian Gulf, either by turning Iran into a client state or, more likely, by creating a new state out of Baluchistan, which straddles Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.† The Baluchis, who consider themselves to be an oppressed minority in Iran and—especially—in Pakistan, may well be receptive to Soviet blandishments. Perhaps the Soviets have made so little international noise over the situation in Lebanon because they realize they have more to gain by letting the West be the influential power in that area of the world while they strive to become the influential power in Southwest Asia.

†The *New York Times* recently reported that the Soviet Union has nearly completed six airfields in southern Afghanistan that will put the Persian Gulf within range of Soviet jet fighters.

The Reagan Administration came into office preaching anti-Communist toughness, but it is not clear the Administration has practiced what it has preached. For one thing, most observers—including Chaliand—say that the only country providing the Afghan fighters with weapons is Egypt. One hopes the Reagan Administration is doing more than the Carter Administration in this area, and it may not be advertising its aid for fear of destabilizing the current regime in Pakistan.

But what has made a shambles out of the Administration's policy of reciprocity has been its decision to lift the grain embargo. According to a specialist in East-West trade, the grain deal enables the Soviets to concentrate on the production of oil and gas, which they can sell to the capitalist world, and eliminate costly expenditures to increase agricultural production. He estimates that by spending \$7 billion to import 46 million tons of grain in 1982, the Soviet Union saved roughly \$32 billion, "and they are escaping the need to make dramatic domestic reforms as well." Even if his analysis is inaccurate, the lifting of the grain embargo has sown a good deal of discord in U.S. relations with Western Europe, whose leaders wonder why they should not sell the Soviet Union a pipeline when the United States is selling them desperately needed grain. To quote George Will, "Reagan's policy is détente without intellect, détente shorn of a strategy for exploiting Soviet vulnerabilities."

The response of the West to the invasion of Afghanistan is a sad story, but it is not an unexpected one. For the past forty years the anti-anti-Communists have prevailed in foreign policy circles—anti-Communism discredited perhaps because it was regarded as the product of a Nixon, a McCarthy, or a Goldwater. As a result, the West has continually found reasons for not acting when the Soviet Union embarks upon another adventure. But there is something particularly disturbing about the West's disinclination to help the Afghans, "who alone among peoples overrun by the Russians," Chaliand says, "have refused to acknowledge this foreign occupation and continue to fight against all odds." The saddest story of the past four years thus is not the West's weakness and confusion but the story of Afghanistan itself. When the first Communist regime of Nur el Taraki took over in April 1978, the Afghan people were subjected to a brutally repressive attempt to change their culture overnight. According to Chaliand, the Khalqi faction of Communists was "in its intellectual poverty, political naiveté, and repressive brutality" not unlike the Khmer Rouge. Since the invasion, the Afghans have seen the Russians raze their villages and poison their wells. Still, the Coolheads refuse to address the question of how to trust a country that has no compunction in violating—both in Afghanistan and Laos—



the Geneva Protocol banning chemical and biological warfare.

The tragedy of Afghanistan raises a larger question: does the West have the staying power to practice a policy of reciprocity? Reciprocity requires sacrifices—indeed civic courage—but the politicians who rule over the advanced capitalist nations generally flinch from talking about sacrifices and courage. Skeptical of the West's stamina, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn argued in his address at Harvard in 1978 that "a decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the West today." Many Americans took offense at Solzhenitsyn's criticism of the West's materialism, arguing that he is a reactionary who makes too much of spirituality. Solzhenitsyn, however, was preoccupied with a problem at least as old as Adam Smith: the effect of commercial expansion on the citizens of a nation. In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith argues that only the citizens of an agricultural nation, i.e., a nation like Afghanistan, possess civic courage. In those nations where commerce thrives, Smith says, "the natural habits of the people render them altogether incapable of defending themselves." In the debate about the effects of commercial expansion, a debate at the center of eighteenth-century thought, Smith was somewhere in the middle—somewhere between Hume, who thought that the expansion of commerce would not make a citizenry "less undaunted and vigorous in defense of their country or their liberty," and Rousseau, who thought that in such societies "true courage fades, [and] the military virtues vanish. . . ."

The unseemly haste with which the West has always renewed its desire to do business with the Soviet Union makes one wonder whether Hume wasn't a bit too optimistic about the ability of predominantly commercial societies to protect themselves. But perhaps Solzhenitsyn's assessment of the West was excessively gloomy, since the West has changed somewhat despite the eagerness of bankers and big businessmen to trade with the Soviet Union—changed in large part, it should be said, because of Solzhenitsyn's own revelations about the Soviet Union. Twenty-five years ago Albert Camus scandalized French intellectual circles when he dared to question the idea that the Soviet Union was a progressive regime—on the side of history, as Sartre might have said. Chaliand, however, does not risk becoming a pariah when he says in his book that "the Soviet regime is without doubt the bloodiest and most deceptive caricature in modern history, a cruel parody of the ideas that supposedly inspire it."

The West of course cannot simply rest on its knowledge that the Soviet Union is a cruel parody. Yet the Coolheads, despite their conviction that they alone are calm and level-headed, have indulged in such

heated rhetoric that it has become difficult to engage in any serious debate about the West's relations with the Soviet Union. George Ball, for example, has called those who disagree with him Manicheans "who espouse the doctrinal concept that Soviet communism is the Antichrist—an evil element that must be extirpated if we are to have peace in the world"; George Kennan has inveighed against "anti-Soviet hysteria" and accused anti-Communists of foolishly assuming that the Soviet

Union intends to attack Western Europe.

Engaged in an attempt to isolate the Reagan Administration and convince Western Europe that the United States is an unreliable ally, the Soviet Union has rushed to appropriate the language of the Coolheads. In what proved to be his farewell address to America, Leonid Brezhnev attacked the "primitive anti-Communism" espoused by the imperialist "hot heads" in Washington and dwelled on the Soviet Union's desire for détente

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and disarmament. "The essence of our policy," he said, "is peaceableness. . . ." The Coolheads do not think the Soviet Union is a benign power, but they do agree with Brezhnev that the major share of blame for the erosion of détente belongs to Ronald Reagan. In a review of Kennan's latest book, Martin Sherwin (a revisionist historian) summed up the views of the Coolheads. The Reagan Administration, Sherwin said, has resurrected and promoted "the vision of Soviet aggression and duplicity set in place during the early years of the cold war . . . to orchestrate a new cold war that facilitates an ongoing military buildup."

In the last decade or so, the Soviet Union has engaged in an extraordinary military buildup (especially in its sea power), invaded Afghanistan, sent its Cuban legionnaires to several African countries, forced the Poles to squelch their own revolution, and crushed those Soviet citizens who dared to take the Helsinki Accords seriously. Yet the new leadership in the Kremlin indicated recently that it expects some concrete American moves to ease tensions before taking up Reagan's offer to seek a "more constructive relationship." Because the Reagan Administration has not been careful in its exposition of its foreign policy, making too many casual

statements about nuclear war, it will be under strong pressure from the Coolheads to respond to the Soviet suggestion. But the Administration should not make any offer without also saying that unless the Soviet Union itself makes an offer, it may do a number of things, including supplying the Afghan freedom fighters with more sophisticated weapons and reinstating the grain embargo. For the United States and her allies should realize that a policy of reassurance, not reciprocation, will result at the very least in the slow transformation of Western Europe into a vassal state that provides its Big Brother to the East with cheap loans, advanced technology, and food. □

Mitchell S. Ross

THE KINDLY MR. UPDIKE

Appearances notwithstanding, John Updike may now be the foremost chronicler of Middle American mores.

The *New Yorker* has never been my favorite magazine. To be sure, the magazine is graceful in much the same way that well-bred old ladies are graceful, and certainly some first-rate writing does manage to get published in the thing from time to time. But for the most part the *New Yorker* is just *there*, as elegant and as stale as an uneaten croissant a week after it has been baked.

That may be one reason why I for so long shied away from John Updike, who has been closely associated with the *New Yorker* ever since his graduation from Harvard University in the early fifties. His spiritual affiliation dates back even further. "When I was thirteen," Updike once wrote, "a magazine came into the house, the *New Yorker* by name, and I loved that magazine so much I concentrated all my wishing into an effort to make myself small and inky and intense enough to be received into its pages." In due course, this happened; and Updike's short stories and book reviews became as familiar a feature of the magazine as John O'Hara's stories had been in an earlier era.

Snobbery also fed my aversion—not so much because the *New Yorker* is the favorite magazine of various Ivy League types who feel themselves civilized and superior for receiving it every week, but because of an unpleasant personal memory. When I was sixteen, in 1970, I first toured Europe, as one of a group of similarly aged bicyclists who hailed from

various parts of the United States. There were two girls from Kansas whose passion it was to enter the museums of Europe and proceed directly to the gift shops, where they would spend hours pawing through poster-sized reproductions of the great works of art which actually hung inside the museums. "I just love those reproductions," said one of the girls on one occasion. Another time her pal, asked what

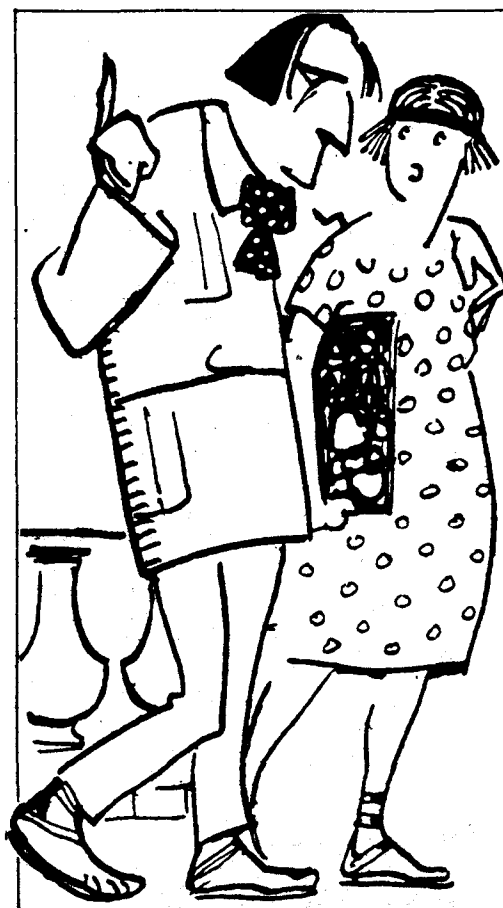
she liked to read, responded, "I like Updike." This was enough to keep me away from the man for several years thereafter.

One day in the mid-seventies, while browsing among used books, I came upon *Couples*, Updike's novel chronicling adultery in Tarbox, a fictitious New England town. For fifty cents it seemed worth a shot. So I bought it, and read it, and failed to enjoy it. The prose and the sex were equally fluent: characters drifting from one bed into another, seeking theological gratification of their fleshly desires. I had recently removed myself from a college scene where much the same sort of thing occurred in less perfumed circumstances. It was all very earnest and at the same time curiously cold—in the case of Updike's novel, a sort of naturalism kissed by Kierkegaard. I turned away from Updike again, with no plans to return.

Then in late 1981 *Rabbit Is Rich** was published. My willing spirit once again permitted itself to be wooed. Like Updike's first two chronicles of the misadventures of Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom, *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, the book was set in Updike's native Pennsylvania, far removed from the high-toned precincts of Updike's other novels and of his precious *New Yorker* stories. Also encouraging was the epigraphic bow to Sinclair Lewis's fondly remembered *Babbitt* which preceded the text of *Rabbit Is Rich*.

Before leaping into the life of Brewer,

*Alfred A. Knopf, \$13.95.



Mitchell S. Ross is author of *The Literary Politicians* and *An Invitation to Our Times*.