

to relieve its tiresomeness. One may ask, should it be tolerated?—and one can only, wearily, acknowledge that, as the price of “free speech” (which cannot be withheld even from certified morons), it should. That it should not be rebutted is another matter. And that it has not been rebutted with much effectiveness is but one more. One finds oneself burning to point out that Israel is still a tiny nation fighting for survival against tremendously powerful adversaries, of which the U.S.S.R. is merely the most powerful, and that the Palestinian cause has, say what you will, been converted into a weapon of annihilation against that small and vulnerable state. But such is probably fruitless effort. We would do better to spend the time improving our understanding of the international political circumambience in which so disheartening a spectacle as Ms. Redgrave’s is possible.

The crucible dates back many years even before Ms. Lillian Hellman, but Ms. Hellman would seem to have become the archetype for our time of this genre of rigidly pro-leftist partisanship. She was the first in a succession of female activists that has included, among many others such as Joan Baez and Shirley MacLaine, Jane Fonda and Ms. Redgrave—the ladies who could always see the horrors on one side but suddenly turned astigmatic when horrors turned up on the other. Soweto visible but never Gulag, McCarthy but never Stalin, Nixon but never Hiss, tiger cages in Saigon but never the decimation of village leaders ordered and committed by Hanoi and the Vietcong, napalm dropped on babies by American fliers over Vietnam but never hunger-and-death forced marches conducted by North Vietnamese conquerors, Watergate but never the Symbionese Liberation Front, and now, supposedly, “Zionist hoodlums” and not the PLO massacre of the innocents in a bus in Israel. This steely-stony one-track partisanship is more vicious than it-all-depends-whose-ox-is-being-gored dishonesty: it is intellectual travesty, moral bankruptcy and bone-deep philosophical self-perjury.

Think back to Lillian Hellman’s apologetics for the infamous Moscow Trials of the ’30s, her support of the Communist-controlled international Waldorf conference of ’49, her untiring efforts to exculpate “the Hollywood Ten” while scorning even to mention, much less be appalled by, the crimes of the totalitarian regime defended and promoted by the “ten.” But what would seem to typify Ms. Hellman’s intellectual integrity was her play, “The Searching Wind,” which some will remember from its brief run on Broadway in the early days of WWII. The principal message of it was that the rise of Fascism and Nazism was chiefly the fault of corrupt upper-class Americans in Europe. When one’s frame of mind is so rigidly doctrinaire it is perhaps no surprise that, with the exposure of one’s previous political statements as

fallacious, one would still continue to refuse to admit one was wrong. A trail has been blazed which was to be assiduously followed down the ensuing years by the sorority of which Ms. Lillian Hellman has been so liberally befogged a house mother.

A recently published posthumous book by Hannah Arendt bewails the prevalent absence in our society of creative thinking. Faced with the ilk of callow and narrowly partisan sententiousness, one can only echo the Arendt lament for our continuing ratiocinative failures by posing the question: Is it too much to ask of those who have reached prominence in public life to first take the trouble to inform themselves of the truth of what they would tell us and above all have the honesty to voice the whole truth? □

Civility in *The New Republic* and Logic that Shines from the *Washington Star*

A letter was recently sent to *The New Republic* magazine protesting a sentence in an article by Mr. Henry Fairlie, a distinguished English emigré. Mr. Fairlie stated that American conservatives, who by nature should have developed aristocratic instincts, turned out rather to be hypocritical populists, while American liberals, who for so long claimed to represent the soul of the people, wound up with a variety of elitist proclivities in their character. To make it clearer, Mr. Fairlie sketched a list of presently prominent neo-conservatives, and passed a judgment: “But these are honorable men.” As both conjunction and preposition, *but* is used here to assert that conservatives are, as a rule, dishonorable men with some exceptions. This assertion was protested in a letter. The letter was never printed.

There is a peculiar logic that regulates the use of the word *conservative* in the inclement environment of today’s media. Not long ago a *Washington Star* book reviewer, wishing to express disapproval

of Paul Johnson’s *Enemies of Society*, wrote:

“The pillars [of our civilization] he [Johnson] says are a brief in moral absolutes: the notion that . . . violence is always wrong; democracy as the least evil form of government; the rule of law; the importance of the individual . . . a healthy middle class; political and economic freedom; exactness in language; the trustworthiness of science; and, finally, the ceaseless pursuit of truth. All this may sound like pretty conservative stuff, but Johnson cannot be so easily categorized: he was the editor of the British liberal weekly *The New Statesman* . . . and he doesn’t fit into any of the traditional right-wing molds.”

Pretty conservative stuff indeed, no one would deny that. If not with political fortunes, the conservatives these days at least seem to be blessed with brilliant critics. □

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