

problems in television news that are directly related to the medium. But there are also distortions that result from the training and background of television journalists. Their training at many universities and as apprentices at newspapers and television stations is an exercise in mimicking media heroes. If Mike Wallace is contentious, young journalists believe that is the appropriate style for an interviewer. How else can one explain the perverse distemper of Geraldo Rivera? His level of despair for social injury shows little distinction between an assassination attempt on the Pope and the decline of his favorite rock star's career. Almost every journalism student thinks of himself as a budding Woodward or Bernstein searching for his Deep Throat. Media stardom is what he aspires to, not the thankless and plodding job of unearthing the difficult facts that give a story its texture. Television news is in a constellation of shooting stars—as soon as you see it, the star is gone, a fleeting memory that neither lingers nor provides illumination.

In the United Kingdom the BBC has introduced the sensible policy of calling anchormen “readers.” Why should American broadcast readers of the Associated Press printout be called anything else? By attributing undeserved status to the “news” people, deplorable distortions are promoted. Perhaps this explains why many viewers have lost perspective on contemporary events and why relatively trivial matters can be exaggerated into earth-shattering calamities. For instance, television newscasters sometimes equate Joseph McCarthy with Hitler. That an overzealous politician who employed questionable tactics can be compared to Hitler is not simply a distortion; it is a lie of such magnitude as to rewrite history. Similar exaggerations abounded with regard to Watergate. That debacle is no longer considered a stupid violation of political fair play or Presidential tampering with the political process; it is now seen as the Soviet Purge or Cromwell's Rump Parliament. If the populace were sophisticated about history, the absurdity of these claims would immediately be

apparent. But that isn't the case. As a result, history is homogenized so that one evil is like another, distinctions lose focus, and even those things one should wish to preserve and defend lose meaning. Television news doesn't simply corrupt, it debases.

But exaggerating events is only one part of the television news calculus. Another significant dimension is its contamination of news. Last month's events are a vague memory; what happened last year is forgotten. A visual montage of blood and gore desensitizes us, leaving in its wake the erasure of history. If history courses were once criticized for their emphasis on names, dates, and places, they can now be criticized for leaving us with little but “feelings”: students now “know” that Kennedy cared and Nixon didn't. It may not be the intent of news programming, but it has promoted historical amnesia. “Docudramas”—the halfway houses between the news and theater—admittedly take liberties with the facts. Such manipulation of the news itself is no longer considered the violation of a sacred trust, even when it is recognized. It simply appears as another kind of docudrama. In

the final analysis—notwithstanding all the pompous claims—television news is more often than not an extension of entertainment programming. It is there for ratings; it titillates and excites. The weatherman is not a reporter; he entertains. The anchor isn't an interpreter or reader; he's a dreamboat. The interview isn't for gathering information; it is designed to intimidate a foe. Even the sports reporter doesn't simply give us scores; he is expected to be a comedian and clown.

Mr. Leshner has performed a valuable service in demonstrating where television news has gone wrong. But he is too charitable. Ultimately he contends that journalistic presentations aren't slanted because of ideology. They are based, he maintains, on misinformation. He is unconvincing. The impact of the Don Hewitts cannot be so lightly cast aside. Misinformation exists some of the time, but not all, or even nearly all, of the time. Producers like Hewitt aren't simply careless—they have an ax to grind. It is knowing what that ax is and how to combat it that might be useful to newsviewers. But since most viewers aren't aware of the producer's intent, news programs can be watched only with a sense of risk. □

Effects of a Limited Imagination

Jean Lacouture: *Léon Blum*; Holmes & Meier; New York.

by Richard A. Cooper

Before every human being lies the burden and opportunity of choice. We must make choices and bear their consequences. Society is a vast web of interpersonal relations wherein individuals are affected by the choices of others and vice versa. The choices certain individuals make, the ideas which enter into those choices, and their results consti-

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tute the subject matter of history. Léon Blum, French premier in the late 1930's, wielded power that affected the lives of millions of people in the tumultuous first half of the 20th century. From Jean Lacouture's account, Blum emerges as a man whose critical choice was to champion what he construed as justice and the republican ideal. The means to his end: socialism.

Originally a man of letters, Blum faced the necessity of making a steady living. His choice is revealing. The young socialist, of impeccably bourgeois origins, made an impeccably bourgeois choice. “In January 1896, he thus became *auditeur* second class in the *Conseil d'Etat*, a

member of the disputed claims section, with a salary of two thousand francs a month; coming one month before his marriage, the salary was enough to set up a household in untroubled comfort." Not the sort of biography one expects for a revolutionary, but then he was not one.

A momentous event transformed the life of Léon Blum from that of the literary figure he was to the politician he became. That event was the Dreyfus Affair, which rocked the Second Republic at the turn of the century. A friendship proved critical to Blum's course, that of Socialist leader Jean Jaures. United by the assaults of their enemies (the Anti-Dreyfusards were proponents of street actions against the Republic) and their similar moral tone, Blum became Jaures's lieutenant in the reformist, parliamentary wing of French socialism. Like their opponents, the Dreyfusards were principally concerned with the future of the nation; the struggle over the innocence or guilt of Alfred Dreyfus was the *casus belli*. For Blum, the "Antis" were the upholders of injustice and a threat to the Republic.

Lacouture shows, convincingly in my opinion, that Blum's "socialism" was an outgrowth of his passion for justice and

his belief that it was the fulfillment of the revolution of 1789. His choice to champion justice and the Republic via the Socialist Party would determine his political career.

The word *socialism* with reference to Blum is put into quotation marks because Blum rendered an already nebulous term almost completely devoid of meaning. Although he could trot out Marx to carry the burden of argument with socialist ranks when occasion demanded, Blum's conception of socialism was strikingly religious, or perhaps better expressed as "sentimental" in the usage of Vilfredo Pareto (*The Mind & Society*). On this point, Lacouture observes that "For neither Jaures nor Blum was socialism a science. . . . For both men, socialism was at once a culture, a morality and an art, the art of harmonizing, rationalizing society." Blum's speeches appealed to justice, not the realization of the pseudo-scientific laws of historical development propounded by Marx.

Marxism suffered a crisis of explanation toward the end of the 19th century when the eagerly expected revolution failed to materialize. In the terms of Thomas Kuhn, there was a breakdown of the paradigm which provided the op-

portunity for rival paradigms, albeit within Marxism. Thus developed the revisionism of Bernstein and Kautsky, as well as the syndicalism of Sorel and the Bolshevikism of Lenin. Blum felt the uneasiness of the crisis of Marxism. Berkeley political scientist A. James Gregor (*The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics and Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism*) interprets Mussolini's fascism as a Marxist heresy which sprang from the crisis of Marxism in order to champion "voluntarism" (as opposed to determinist historicism) and the affective power of appeals, including nationalist ones. Blum's approach can be interpreted similarly, discarding determinism in favor of appeals to justice and the ideas of 1789 (a convenient, ready-made Sorelian "myth"). While not going over to the nationalist camp as Mussolini would do, this meant that Blum and his cohorts could bask in patriotic glory, helpful with an electorate schooled in the mystique of the nation.

Blum's economics differentiate him from contemporary Socialists. He considered planning to be inherently totalitarian, in tones reminiscent of *The Road to Serfdom*. Moreover, like Djilas or Trotsky, the Stalinists were creating a "new class" that, in his eyes, was inimical to freedom and democracy. Nationalizations of French industry under Blum were primarily of the transport and "public utility" sort that most European states had always reserved for themselves. It was de Gaulle who imposed indicative planning on France. Lacouture brings to light the interesting revelation that, influenced by Jacques Rueff, Blum was committed to the defense of the gold standard.

Lacouture defends Blum against charges that a historic chance to seize power for the working class was betrayed by his government. Communist leader Maurice Thorez termed the Popular Front a contract between the middle class and the working class. Unlike Mitterrand's government, the Popular Front was a parliamentary working majority of

In the Mail

***Liar's Manual* by Roland Baker; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** This book promotes lying. And that's the truth.

***The War Powers Resolution: Its Implementation in Theory and Practice* by Robert F. Turner; Foreign Policy Research Institute; Philadelphia.** As is well known, too many cooks spoil the soup. The War Powers Resolution, which puts everyone in the kitchen, has, the author argues, made a hash of diplomacy.

***International Debt: Crisis and Challenge* by Robert E. Weintraub; George Mason University; Fairfax, VA.** The questions involved with U.S. banks "lending" to Eastern bloc and lesser developed countries (LDC's) are examined in this brief but thorough study.

***Private Rights & Public Lands* edited by Phillip N. Truluck; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC.** A line for Watt-baiters: "A growing number of environmental economists, legal scholars, and other experts have concluded the public bureaucracies overseeing federal and state lands have been primarily responsible for the myriad economic and environmental problems which have developed." "For Sale" signs, anyone?

***Renaissance*, Vol. XXXV, No. 3, edited by Joseph Schwartz; Marquette University Press; Milwaukee.** Literary essays with a difference: a Christian perspective.

Socialists, Communists, and the middle-class Radicals. The Communists remained aloof from the government, while the Radicals were notoriously opportunistic.

Blum's most important decision during the Popular Front government was to remain neutral during the Spanish Civil War, an action which sealed the fate of the Spanish Republic. Why did he choose this course? Lacouture suggests that Blum, an ardent Anglophile, was swayed by the British Tory government's opposition to aid for the Republic. However, it seems that the palpable threat of civil war in France itself necessarily restrained Blum. Blum regarded the uprising as a blow against his own Popular Front. The International Brigades who fought for the Loyalists are remembered today, but many Frenchmen fought for the Nationalists. The right and segments of the army were openly supportive of the rebels, which must chasten a government bordered by the two principal allies of the Nationalists, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Blum's policy was strange: challenging Russia, Germany, and Italy to join his noninterventionist stand while covertly providing token amounts of aid to the Republicans.

Was Blum's choice of socialism necessary? Could he have maintained his ideals with another vehicle? The domain of choice was not wide. The right was openly anti-Semitic, hostile to the Republic, and quite prone to violence (both assassination and street mobs). As for the bourgeois parties, they were exemplars of opportunist parliamentary politics and tainted by corruption, such as the Panama Scandal and the Stavisky Affair. Blum and Lacouture take for granted that socialism is just.

Many readers will undoubtedly approach this book with hopes that it will allow them to predict the actions of the Mitterrand government. They will be disappointed. Mitterrand is not Léon Blum, and the world of today is radically different from that of 1936. The Communists did not participate in the Popular Front cabinet, and the balance of sup-

port between the two parties was far more equal in 1936. France at that time was in the depths of depression and had very real external and internal threats to its security. Moreover, thanks to de Gaulle, Mitterrand as president has pow-

ers not dreamed of by Blum as premier. Léon Blum sought to do right by his nation and the world. He can be faulted for the lack of imagination that restricted his choice to socialism, but his devotion to justice itself was not a failing. □

Ties that Strangle

Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter: *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians, and the New Left*; Oxford University Press; New York.

by J. David Hoeveler, Jr.

Secularity, it's often stated, is the governing norm of life in these late-20th-century times. The refrain rings so familiar that we take note when we hear that, for some explanations of human behavior, religion counts. Here we have the most exhaustive and detailed study of a movement of the recent past and more than halfway through it the authors pause to explain what they have made clear already: the most important key to the radical personality types that constituted the American New Left of the 1960's is religious background. But ours are confusing times. Stanley Rothman and Robert Lichter feel safer referring to Jewish and other groups as "ethnic" rather than "religious" categories. And well they might, for the central focus of their study is the radical, thoroughly secularized Jew. Born to a family whose religion survives as no more than distant memories of immigrant grandparents and their ghetto culture, these children inherited a family pattern thoroughly cosmopolitan in outlook and modernist in style. If there was a religion to rebel against, it was but a ghost. So the drama here does not follow the familiar script of a generation gap and its attending hostilities. The Jewish rebel moved toward the same liberal and radical ex-

trêmes of the parental model.

Roots of Radicalism is essentially a contribution to psychology. Based on extensive questionnaires sent to more than 1100 students at four American universities and amplified by in-depth analyses of a more select group, the study attempts to draw personality portraits of conservative, liberal, and radical students. The authors provide a critique of the studies that preceded theirs; they find serious weaknesses in all of them, most often the investigators' biases in favor of the New Left. Rothman and Lichter avoid appealing to any mode of psychological determinism in accounting for the emergence of the New Left in the 1960's. That phenomenon sprang from coincidental causes that provided a unique historical occasion to vent inner dilemmas and hidden rage. The authors believe, too, that psychological factors governed the larger shape of the radical movement, which sprang from a heavily Jewish domination in the early years, one continuous with a European and American tradition, and moved to a non-Jewish domination much more violent in character.

The Jewish presence in Western radicalism emerged with its escape from the European ghetto. The Enlightenment and its militant expression in Napoleon dismantled the structure of feudalism and seemed to promise to assimilate all peoples into the modern state. Reform Jews embraced these causes, but an even more religiously deracinated group carried their zealotry into revolution, socialist idealism, and Marxism. This tradition of dissent, by the early decades of the 20th century, received a more formalized academic expression in the writ-

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