

Comment

“The Bomb That Didn’t Go Off”

DENIS HEALEY’s thoughtful and stimulating article in the July *ENCOUNTER* deals with what he calls the question posed by Korea and Dien Bien Phu: Will any power in fact use its thermonuclear weapons except in the last extremity when its own survival is unequivocally at stake? To that question I would reply: No, certainly not. But I don’t think it was posed by Korea and Dien Bien Phu. It has been my business to think about atomic and thermonuclear warfare perhaps longer and more carefully than most people, and it has never occurred to me that anyone should be so utterly irresponsible as to launch thermonuclear war except in the very last resort, when the survival of freedom is unequivocally at stake.

That raises in its turn two other questions. First, what do we imagine that this Great Deterrent will in fact deter? The most that the advocates of the deterrent policy have ever claimed for it is that it will deter a potential aggressor from undertaking total war as an instrument of policy—as Hitler did in 1939—or from embarking on a course of international action which obviously involves a serious risk of total war—as the Austrian Government did in 1914. That is all. But goodness knows it is important enough—it is in fact one of the most revolutionary developments in human history. And I see no reason to imagine that it will be invalidated when we reach what Sir Winston called “saturation point.” Denis Healey himself rightly says that scientific development is tending to “consolidate the predicament in which, though each side can annihilate the other’s cities, neither can hope to destroy the other’s power of retaliating in kind.” As long as that remains true, I believe we have seen the end of total war as we have known it in our generation.

I agree that China is less susceptible than America (or Russia) to thermonuclear attack. But—though I do not rate the present Government of China as a world menace comparable to Soviet Communism—I do not think Mr. Chou En-lai’s attitude of sweet reasonableness at Bandung was entirely unrelated to the existence of the U.S. Strategic Air Command. As for Russia—can anyone seriously believe that the men in the Kremlin, who perpetrated one of

the blackest acts of treachery in the world’s history in the betrayal of Bor’s Army in Warsaw, and who have been a curse on the world ever since, have suddenly become less impossible to deal with for any reason other than the Western policy of strength, based on the hydrogen bomb? In other words, the deterrent is working in the sphere—the only sphere—in which anyone is entitled to expect it to work.

BUT to complain because it has not worked to prevent minor local aggressions in Asia is to expect far more of it than anyone is entitled to expect. In a moment of aberration, H.M.G. in their Statement on Defence 1954 said that the growth of the deterrent would make adventures like Korea by the Communist World less likely. On the contrary; it will, if anything, make them more likely. Mr. Acheson said last year that local wars like Korea are the only wars we can afford these days; that is equally true of the Communist half of the world. It is possible that, when contemplating some local aggression, they may hold their hands at the eleventh hour for fear of it blowing up into a global holocaust; who knows?—that may have happened in the Formosa Strait. But it would be quite unsafe to assume that we shall not see further small wars on the Korea, or more likely the more difficult Indo-China, model. In those circumstances, “massive retaliatory power” makes little sense. Even Mr. Dulles has said we can’t deal with every local war by blowing it up into World War III. An unpleasant truth, which some of us have yet to learn, is that in these sort of wars there is no substitute for tough, well-trained, professional troops on the ground—naturally with air cover and support. And to redress the inevitable adverse balance of numbers, they must be free to use the tactical atomic weapon which, as Denis Healey rightly points out, favours the defence rather than the aggressor. Do not let us worry unduly about that spilling over into the whole-hog thermonuclear war. There is no reason why it should. People who voice that objection too often assume that the enemy will be just waiting for an excuse to plunge into global war. Nonsense; he will be just as anxious to avoid it as we—and probably more so.

The second question I referred to above is: What is the last resort, the last extremity when our survival would be unequivocally at stake? I say it is if and when it becomes quite clear that we are in for total war with Russia. I don't think China is in the same category at all; a local war in Asia might develop into a situation in which the survival of some of our SEATO partners would be at stake, and no one can say that the time might not arrive when the grim decision has to be made in that context. But I believe that unlikely. In Europe, however, the issue would pretty soon be quite clear. Naturally I don't suggest we should launch the hydrogen-bomb offensive the moment some major frontier incident occurs—which is still not inconceivable even in Europe. That is the primary reason why we must have what are now rather oddly called "conventional" forces in Germany—something between the hydrogen bomb and the policeman—to deal with a situation like Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland. But the moment it became clear (and I think it would soon become pretty clear) that the Kremlin had decided on the desperate gamble of total war—then I see no alternative to the thermonuclear arbitrament. Denis Healey agrees we must retain that capacity "as the ultimate weapon if other methods failed to halt the Red Army."

That leads on to his own elaboration of the question quoted at the beginning of this comment: Can the West afford to put itself in the position where its only effective reaction to a major military advance by Communism means self-destruction? To that I am inclined to reply—can it afford not to? It would obviously suit the Soviets admirably to have what Gruenther has called the "war of flesh"; I cannot see that we have any practical prospect whatever of meeting them successfully on that level—even with the help of the tactical atomic weapon. Denis Healey gives some good reasons later in his article; and I really do not believe that the tactical atomic weapon could decisively redress our inevitable inferiority in conventional weapons to an enemy who is entirely regardless of the cost in human life. It is all very well to talk about making mobile formations "comparatively independent of land supply," but we cannot ignore the economics of defence, and the cost of air supply on the scale envisaged by some soldiers would be astronomical. And I have seen enough of attempts at "international specialisation" to reduce the cost of conventional armaments to be a bit sceptical about it.

So, while I agree that the thermonuclear deterrent is of only limited application, I believe it to be of decisive importance. And I do not think we can maintain more strength "in every mode of warfare" than we are now trying to

do. Finally, the world has surely now become so small that the U.S. is hardly likely to regard her interests as "only indirectly involved" by a Soviet conquest of Europe, whether or not American soldiers were still stationed on the Continent.

MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE
SIR JOHN SLESSOR

*Yeovil
Somerset*

Fei Hsiao-tung

IN HIS romantic review of *China's Gentry* (ENCOUNTER, January 1955) Karl A. Wittfogel states that "Mao ordered Fei to concentrate his researches on urban reconstruction, and to stop busying himself with the gentry, which the Communists understood better than he. Rumour has it so. In any case, Fei was given a place on various government boards and committees. But he was kept out of the villages, which in the past he had studied so intensely."

With such a nice ear for rumour, it is not surprising that Wittfogel is deaf to the truth, which many British and other scholars have known for three years. It is that Fei Hsiao-tung is the President of the Central Institute of Nationalities at Peking, and that his extensive field-studies are, by the very nature of his duties, rural and not urban. Mr. Wittfogel is therefore right in saying that Fei's "position is high," but not in assuming that "his voice is low." Apart from the fact that high positions and low voices are not the usual expectancy, in China or anywhere else, Fei's voice is in great demand everywhere, including the most remote areas of China. I have seen dozens of published photographs of him speaking to large audiences in various Minority territories.

Mr. Wittfogel also says that "Fei stopped writing to his friends immediately after the Communists seized power; and his statements since that time do not necessarily express his innermost feelings. But having known him personally, I consider it more than likely that in the depths of his heart he comprehends fully the tragedy which has overwhelmed him and his countrymen."

Again, the truth is different. Fei, who was never a good correspondent anyway, has not written to his *American* acquaintances largely because letters from China can have very unpleasant consequences for their recipients in ENCOUNTER's America. It is just as well for Fei that he felt this way; for, if he has more "friends" like Wittfogel in the United States, there is no knowing what they could conjure

up by Wittfogelish interpretations of a few letters. It is a very curious token of regard that Wittfogel should publish statements that, according to his own fantasy-pictures of China, could only lead Fei to prison or to the executioner. Fortunately, they are not true; and Fei is much too highly respected and personally integrated to be unduly disturbed by poorly aimed dirt thrown by peculiarly affectionate friends.

I should add that my personal knowledge of Fei is evidently more extensive than Wittfogel's, since we have been close friends for twenty years and had several conversations in Peking during October–November 1955. On one of these occasions I went to tea at his home, and was compelled by his charming wife and himself to stay to pot-luck dinner, so that it can at least be said that we talked as two good friends will in such circumstances.

He commiserated with me good-humouredly because I was still "writing so felicitously about race problems," while he at last had become an "anthropologist in action," in an exhilarating atmosphere where "cooperative work with minorities" has already produced such outstanding results; and I agreed, from what I had seen of the new position of the minorities, that I envied him—as I sincerely do. As compensatory boasting I reminded him that in the days before the war we had *both* been excited by the successes of the Chinese Red Army and its policies, to which he replied laughingly that if I had had more good sense I should, like himself, also have arranged to have been born in China.

This is scarcely the table talk of a man overwhelmed by a deep sense of personal and social tragedy. His only complaint, roused by my asking about his "recent book," which he had not even seen, was that a work bearing his name should have been printed without his approval. It is still more disturbing that a collection of elderly minor articles should be published, without the author's consent and against his interests.

CEDRIC DOVER

London, W.6

I GATHER you are already printing a more fully and recently informed letter than I could send about the Chinese sociologist Fei Hsiao-tung, whose sincerity was smeared by Mr. Wittfogel in a recent number of *ENCOUNTER*. What might still need pointing out is that Fei, as head of the University for National Minorities in Peking, represents one of those parts of the work of the present Government which a historically conscious Chinese intellectual is least of all likely to feel ashamed of. The Chinese have a bad record as colonists in the past, not that they were at all racially prejudiced, but

that a tribesman could not expect much unless he adopted Chinese culture. The present sturdy drive to encourage minority cultures, and make a display of them in Peking every year to prove that they are not forgotten, is a conscious attempt to correct the errors of the past. That is why I feel the casual assertion that Fei must be feeling ashamed of himself is a particularly bad guess, as well as being rather nasty.

WILLIAM EMPSON

The University, Sheffield

[*Mr. Wittfogel replies:*

Neither Mr. Dover nor Mr. Empson has contested my statement that, for a long period prior to 1949, Fei's views differed fundamentally from Marxist-Leninist dogma. Anyone who recognises this fact will understand that Dr. Redfield, in presenting the English version of Fei's articles on the gentry (which Fei himself had helped to prepare), was not disclosing any dark secrets to the Communists. And he should also be willing to concede that my assumption regarding Fei's state of mind now is reasonable and legitimate. Many have speculated regarding the innermost thoughts of literary and political figures in Russia who, never having been Marxists or Communists, have nevertheless conformed to the Communist order. In a comparable setting, I suggested that a Fei who preserved any of his earlier views and values would be deeply disturbed by the developments that, under Mao's régime, are occurring today in the Chinese villages. I have elsewhere given more details regarding these developments, which involve forced collectivisation, famine, flight from the farms, and, in cases of overt defiance, brutal persecution, slave labour, and death.

My critics, having seen Fei since 1949, take great satisfaction in asserting that Fei is today a very happy man. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps Fei's moral fibre is weaker than I, on the basis of a rather long friendship, believe. Perhaps today Fei is indeed an enthusiastic supporter of policies that formerly were alien to his way of thinking. This, however, does not entitle them to minimise the changes in Fei's professional life after 1949. The fact remains that under the Communist Government he is no longer occupied professionally with the Chinese peasantry. My critics admit this indirectly by pointing to his present work with tribal minorities. True, some minority groups live in villages. But my review leaves no doubt about the kind of villages I was discussing. The difference is crucial. After his talk with Mao, Fei was no longer permitted to deal with the Chinese peasants, who were so well known to him and who numerically, politically, and eco-

nominally are incomparably more important than the non-Chinese tribes.

The objection to my comment that, while Fei's position was high, his voice was low, equally misses the mark. Again, taken in context, my statement is unmistakably clear. When speaking of Fei's "voice," I was not thinking of the number of words that Fei is allowed to utter. A dialectical parrot can be both noisy and garrulous. What I had in mind was Fei's freedom to discuss independently and critically, as he had done formerly, such problems as the character of China's traditional society, land reform, centralisation of agriculture and industry, and the inter-relation between power, wealth, and property. Any literate person knows—or ought to know—that in Communist China free discussion of such matters is impossible.

KARL A. WITTFOGEL

*Chinese History Project
Columbia University
New York]*

Professor Redfield has also supplied us with the following comment:

Mr. Morin of our Press at the University of Chicago has sent me a copy of Mr. Cedric Dover's comment on Professor Wittfogel's review in *ENCOUNTER* of *China's Gentry* by Fei Hsiao-tung. My wife and I read with great interest what Mr. Dover wrote about his visit with Fei. As Fei's friends we are glad to hear, though indirectly, that he is getting on so well. We do not think that Mr. Wittfogel's representations can be read as an authoritative statement of Fei's present situation any more than we think that Mr. Dover is in a position to state what were Fei's intentions in 1948 with regard to the publication of *China's Gentry*.

On this last point I am in a position to make a statement. I do so now in view of what Mr. Dover writes in the last paragraph of his letter wherein he reports that Fei complained to him that the book was published without his consent. I make no statement as to Fei's present views about which I know very little. But I can assure you, as I have assured the University of Chicago Press, that throughout the preparation of the draft of the book in Peiping, in the autumn of 1948, Fei talked frequently of having the book published in America, plainly declared his intention that it be so published, and hurried the work in order that we might take the manuscript with us when we left Peiping in December. His intentions at that time were recorded in general terms in the inscription he wrote and signed in a copy of the Chinese publication of the same papers which he was then engaged in translating and modifying as he

worked with my wife. I have this book in front of me, and I copy the inscription on the fly-leaf: To Greta,

I hope very much that a part of this book could be translated as the second step in our joint work in sociology. Nothing is more encouraging to me than that work to explore the mystery of Chinese Society can be continuously carried on even at the time of this disturbance.

(signed) Hsiao-Tung
21/11, 1948

ROBERT REDFIELD

Chicago, Illinois

The Bad Old Style

STR—Though amused by Mr. Hilary Corke's article, "The Bad Old Style," in the June number of *ENCOUNTER*, I could not prevent myself from feeling somewhat indignant at his treatment of two of the contributors to "Oxford Poetry 1954."

In the first place, he quotes some lines from a poem by Mr. George MacBeth with the introductory comment, "The same poet provides plenty of examples of the 'Empsonian' movement at its most characteristic and most absurd," without bothering to reveal that this very piece is intended as a candidly humorous comment on another poem printed in the same volume.

Secondly, he contrives to misrepresent the so-called "Empsonian" poets in general by his facetious description of their method. This, from my observation, contains a large element of "grotesquerie." The philosophical terms, the classical references, and the mildly improper ones, are present as part of a parody of the stuffy academism against which the poet is in revolt. They are part of Mr. Empson's salutary legacy of frivolity, and should not be taken more seriously than they are meant.

Where Mr. Corke might most usefully have commented, he remained silent. For example, he said nothing about the way Mr. Jonathan Price and Mr. MacBeth, among others, have taken up the exploitation of specialist vocabularies. The Neo-Georgianism which Mr. Corke admires is well enough in its way, but any poet who writes in its convention has to abandon all claim to a great many English words in current use. Perhaps it is a good thing for literature that there exist young poets brave enough to wish to use the full possibilities of the language.

EDWARD LUCIE-SMITH

*Royal Air Force
Pewsey, Wilts*

BOOKS

An Enigmatic Giant

BETWEEN contemporary judgement of a man and the judgement of history there often occurs a phase when uninformed public opinion instinctively anticipates definite ideas. That is the Bismarck situation at the moment. Contemporary judgement of Bismarck was diverse and bewildered, ranging from Queen Victoria's open disgust to the adoration of his admirers in Germany and abroad. Today he figures in popular ideas as a "bad thing," a great and brutal man of genius who ruined Germany by setting her on the path of aggression. Final agreement with or refutation of this judgement is likely to be deferred for some time yet, not only because Germany remains an emotional subject, but because Bismarck's complexity can make him obscure to those who study him most. Great as he was, he lacked the simplicity of greatness.

Mr. A. J. P. Taylor, of Magdalen College, Oxford, the author of entrancing essays on Hohenzollern Germany, now appears as the latest biographer of the founder of the German Empire. He has evidently long pondered and studied his subject, and the resultant book* is a worthy addition to the literature of Bismarck, all the more needed because the British contribution to that literature is smaller than it should be. It is a book which should hasten the formation of a lasting opinion.

As in his memorable essay on the same subject, Mr. Taylor is never unaware that he is dealing with one of the great paradoxes of all time. The Iron Chancellor stands before us in his brilliant Prussian uniform, his steel helmet and big boots and spurs, this man who only spent a year in the army (after try-

ing to mangle his way out of it); who created the greatest military state of the modern world and was the last German civilian of the second Reich to keep soldiers in their place; who despised Prussian bureaucrats and formed an Empire whose strength was in the size, efficiency, and discipline of its bureaucracy, and whose weakness was in the inflexibility and lack of mental breadth that goes with excessive civil service. The modern belief that the state is total master of the individual received its greatest impetus from a man who had never read Hegel and had but the flimsiest notions of what that philosopher had written about. Many people see in Wagner the bard of the Germany which, under Bismarck's political direction, conquered in 1871. Bismarck said Wagner was a monkey.

In his work for the Prussian royal house we see the contradiction at the root of Bismarck's character in a formidably clear light. He raised the Hohenzollerns to dizzy heights, but he was no royalist. He was a courtier all his life but never learned respect. He needed King William and the King needed him, and they spent their lives in a titanic if usually disguised quarrel. Their predicament received perfect expression at the proclamation of the King as Kaiser in January 1871 amid the conquered glories of Versailles. William was not Imperially-minded, but if he had to rule an Empire he wanted to be called "Emperor of Germany," a territorial title indicating something better than presidency. Bismarck wanted just presidency (so long as he was around), and for that reason insisted on the alternative title "German Emperor." At the very last moment William tried a bold move. He cornered the Grand Duke of Baden and told him to lead the cheering for the "Emperor of

* *Bismarck*. By A. J. P. TAYLOR. Hamish Hamilton. 18s.