This Month's *ENCOUNTER*:—

1985?

It used to be said (by Europeans of course) that when ideas grew old they went to America to be born again. Now it seems they go East. Just when the West had become utterly bored with anti-Communist propaganda; just when the feeling was widespread that even truth grows stale when it is uttered too often; just when everyone was resigning himself to the fact that there was no sense in banging one's head against a stone wall, that we had to co-exist with Communist totalitarianism and might as well make the best of it; just when references to the Moscow trials and slave labour camps and suppression of intellectual freedom were becoming distinctly *vieux jeux*—at that very point the whole business started echoing back at us from behind the Iron Curtain. No sooner did Mr. Arthur Koestler decide (understandably enough) that Cassandra had grown hoarse than Mr. Howard Fast miraculously found his voice. There we were, grudgingly reconciled to Big Brother and 1984, and without warning *they* showed signs of experiencing a new year.

It is all very exciting. But, oddly enough, the free world has refused to get excited. The almost automatic reaction, it would seem, is to raise a warning finger, put on a long face (if one isn't wearing it already), and explain with solemn gravity that we should not indulge in wishful thinking. The Communist rulers are still Communist; their régimes are still oppressive to their subjects and inimical to us; there have been previous "thaws" followed by extreme frost; the present relaxation might even, in the long run, make Communism more dangerous because less self-destructive; and so on and so forth. It is a useful sermon and true; and the revolt in Poznan has demonstrated how risky it is for a totalitarian régime to experiment with liberalisation—it is far easier to suppress people than to manipulate them. As we write this, it is not yet clear whether the process of dismantling Stalinist orthodoxy will be terminated or postponed or unaffected. But, whatever happens now, a return to the *status quo ante* is excluded as a possibility, and we ought not to underestimate the significance of what has already taken place. A myth has been destroyed; and with it a faith, and a nightmare. Terror is now simply terror—nothing more, nothing "higher." Whatever now happens in the Communist world will be events in a profane, not a sacred history; and we shall be spared that *mysterium tremendum* which Communism has hitherto excited in both its opponents and adherents.

Above all, concern for the future ought not to distract us from realising that this demythologisation, and its inevitable if still inscrutable consequences, is what we *wanted* to happen; and that this, moreover, is what we should have expected to happen, had we real confidence in our own ideals and ideas. Confidence, however, is not something that the free world has shown any surplus of in recent years. We preferred the pathos of a languid *Weltschmerz*, imagining ourselves with indecent foresight as the righteous and defeated. Now a new voice has disturbed our reverie:

> *Take them off me, these rags of dogma,*
> *give me a simple overcoat.*

So wrote the Polish poet, Adam Wazyk, on April 8th of this year. That simple overcoat, of course, is our everyday dress; we had lost the habit of regarding it with any special favour; and we are bound to feel uncomfortable and slightly ashamed when the dispossessed show how highly they prize it, and therefore how niggardly was our own appreciation of it. Possibly we too shall be affected by what is happening in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and even Russia. We think it revealing that two of our contributors to this issue, Miss Beloff and Mr. Jelenski, the one writing about Russia and the other about Poland, and each writing independently of the other, should conclude their articles by questioning the pessimistic vision that found expression in *1984* and *Darkness at Noon*.

WHAT is particularly interesting about the developments in Eastern Europe is the rôle that the intellectuals have played. The tumult and agitation there doubtless has deep causes and reflects a general discontent. But in all of these countries, to one extent or another, what we have been witnessing is a revolt of the intellectuals against the totalitarian system. Somehow, one didn't expect it. They were, after all, a highly privileged class, with a standard of luxury and a social status that many in the West found reason to envy. They were, presumably, converts to the New Faith, supple in accommodating themselves to the latest turn of doctrine, the most recent nuance of dogma. They were busy, self-confident, bold, and rather frightening, these New Soviet Men. And then, suddenly, there were none.

What happened? What happened was that one of our clichés took on body and life. That free human spirit, whose praises we in the West dutifully mumbled, and whose inextinguishability we mechanically proclaimed, has in fact turned out to be something precious and inextinguishable. Our own fundamental values are being rediscovered for us, with a fear and trembling that recovers them from the conventional and academic and makes them once again real and vital.

I am not worthy of praise,
Believe me, my friend, it chills my bones
When you praise my courage.

I am not a tiger; I am a human being,
My worn heart is a nest of fears,
Believe me: I am scared. I am scared.

(Zoltan Zelk in *Iroldalmi Ujsàg* [Hungary] May 5th, 1956)

NOTES ON OUR CONTRIBUTORS

WILLIAM H. WHYTE, Jr. is Assistant Managing Editor of *Fortune* magazine in New York. His article represents a revised version of two chapters from a forthcoming book, *The Organisation Man*, to be published shortly in New York by Simon & Schuster. . . . PATRICIA HUTCHINS' new book on James Joyce, *James Joyce's World*, is being published by Methuen at the end of the year. . . . K. A. JELENSKI, of Polish origin and now living in Paris, has contributed art and literary criticism to many French reviews. . . . NORA BELOFF is Paris correspondent for the *Observer*. . . . SEYMOUR M. LIPSET is Associate Professor of Sociology at Columbia University in New York. . . . C. A. R. CROSLAND was Member of Parliament (Labour) for Gloucestershire South, 1950–5. His article, ". . . About Equality," is the second of a three-part series which we are publishing. . . .

SEVERAL readers have written to us, calling attention to the fact that the quotation from Manuilsky, which appeared in Frank Moraes' contribution last month, is of spurious origin. This particular quotation has been widely used in the press, and Mr. Moraes can scarcely be blamed for assuming its authenticity. No one seems to be quite sure just when and where it first made its appearance; and it appears that Soviet scholars have not been able to prevent its widespread circulation. Perhaps this little note will contribute to that end.

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Beware of Your Personality

A Report on the Tests of Conformity

ONE of the more interesting experiences in American life today is the taking of "personality tests." On the surface the business seems simple enough; on a standard test blank you simply answer a lot of questions which, while extremely personal or odd or apparently foolish, take little time or thought on your part, for you are given a set of prefabricated answers to choose from. What psychologists make of your choices, however, is quite awesome; what with norms of one kind or another, percentile ratings, correlation coefficients and such, the tests can be automatically processed to tell all sorts of things about you. Most importantly, they tell—to the decimal point—how well you are likely to fit in with "the group," and for this reason they have become very popular in big organisations as a screening device. Almost every kind of organisation—from high schools to colleges to big corporations—use them; indeed, testing has now become so widespread that it is almost impossible these days for a white-collar American to come of age without having taken a battery of tests.

In regular use are tests which purport to tell a man's degree of his practical judgment, his social judgment, the amount of perseverance he has, his stability, his contentment index, his hostility to society, his personal sexual attitudes—and now some psychologists are tinkering with a test of a sense of humour. More elaborate yet are the projective techniques; with such devices as the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test the subject is asked to spin a story, thereby X-raying himself for latent feelings and psychoses.

Pondering these inquisitions into the psyche, one's first instinct is to see them as a harbinger of 1984. It is not in this respect, however, that they are significant. This would be praising them too much. Appalling, yes, but they should not be damned as instruments of the devil. They are not that effective. We are still a resourceful people, and very much in the same fashion that the American has developed a considerable insulation against advertising appeals, so he has become rather skilful in answering personality tests.

It is in another respect that the tests are significant. They unite two powerful currents in modern thought. Technically, the tests are the ultimate expression of scientism—that is, the old positivist dream that all the affairs of man are susceptible to solution by the rigid application of "scientific method." Ideologically, they express the contemporary yearning to believe that society's values and the individual's are now completely compatible—or,