

"petty bourgeois democratic ideas."

As every new defeat of the Western Communist parties led to bitter internal conflicts, with the Russians openly intervening to decide the policies and remove their leaders, this mutual disillusion became manifest. The documents of the early twenties are full of the strange scholastic disputes over the tactics of the "revolutionary offensive" or the "united front" in which these struggles were fought out—disputes which were then conducted in public with remarkable "democratic" frankness, even though the victory of the Russian leaders was always assured in advance. Thus, every year saw some of the outstanding pioneers of Communism in the West break with the Comintern, amidst gloomy warnings that no true revolutionary parties could ever develop under the constant manipulations of Moscow, only negligible sects without roots in the Labour movement of their own countries.

In fact, however, it was the idealistic old Western revolutionaries who gradually faded into sectarian impotence as the main stream of the Labour movement pursued its reformist course, while the Communist parties, led by rootless "*apparachiki*" obedient to Moscow, remained at least a *potential* force, thanks to their

new form of organisation. And as the Fascists and Nazis came to apply the Bolshevik invention of the centralised state-party and the one-party state for their own purposes, Stalin gradually realised what Lenin had never been conscious of—that this instrument of power can rely on different classes in turn, and can also be applied in a parliamentary democracy to seize power by "legal" means. It was in the Popular Front period that Western Communist parties first began to acquire the manoeuvrability—and, as Spain showed, the ruthlessness—of their Fascist opponents. But the full technique for achieving a Communist dictatorship by "legal" means was only applied in Eastern Europe after the Second World War.

What the Moscow twentieth congress has now proclaimed as the new discovery of the "peaceful road to socialism," i.e. to Communist dictatorship, has in fact been Stalin's original contribution to international Communist strategy, though his ungrateful heirs forgot to mention the fact. Their own new step is merely to authorise the application of this method in countries not bordering the Soviet bloc: to that extent, the "Leninist revival" consists in the bolder use of Stalinist techniques of power for Leninist, world-revolutionary aims.

Richard Lowenthal

## A PHILOSOPHY FOR LITTLE ENGLAND

"IT is pleasant to record an English victory abroad . . ."—so began a recent report in *The Times* of a football match between English and Finnish teams. I at first assumed this was intended as light irony. But no; it turned out to be just plain insularity. In that same issue, there was a three-inch story, buried at the bottom of the second sports page, on the victory of Sugar Ray Robinson over Bobo Olsen in a fight for the world's middleweight championship. There are still parts of the globe, one knows, where world championships and world records are regarded as real news. Here, absolute performance excites less interest than does the relative performance of an Englishman. Thus the reports in the British press of the Marciano-Cockell fight explained in great detail, and with much maudlin flag-waving, how gallantly Cockell had lost, and rather neglected telling us how Marciano had won—or even that it was a nondescript specimen of a prize-fight, when all was said and done.

The flag, it seems, has followed the empire—

all the way home. One can even say that it has rushed home in undue and precipitate haste. Britain is still considerably more than a little island off the coast of Europe; "Little England" is more a state of mind than a fact. But as a state of mind, it is one of the significant facts about Britain today. It sets the dominant tone for English politics, which avoids the strenuous and seeks contentment in urbane—or should it be suburban?—accommodation. It also characterises the post-war English novel: whatever it is that Lucky Jim wants, it stops short of heaven and this wide world too. And it is the outstanding feature of contemporary British philosophy.

"Love does loathe the disdainfull nicetee"—or so Spenser thought. But when one picks up a collection of recent British essays on political philosophy,\* one discovers the extent to which the love of truth that is philosophy can be transformed into disdainful nicety, precisely. These

\* *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*. Edited by PETER LASLETT. Basil Blackwell. 18s.

essays—with the exception of Professor Michael Oakeshott's memorable inaugural lecture and the editor's thoughtful reflections on "The Face to Face Society" (it is not clear why either should have been gathered into such a company)—all represent, and are intended to represent, work done by the school of "linguistic analysis." This is now, one gathers, *the* British school in the sense that, though it may not be the largest in numbers, it has pre-empted the attention of the young. The book does not put forward the very best in this school—neither Professor Gilbert Ryle nor Professor A. J. Ayer is included, for example. But it does convey a distinct impression of the school as a school.

And there is no mistaking the fact that this is a very British school indeed. It is almost as if there had been a deliberate effort to caricature the "Englishness of English philosophy," with all those famous English virtues wildly exaggerated: the detestation of sham and artifice, the plain-speaking, the almost supernatural sensibleness; and with all those famous English vices wildly exaggerated too: the parochialness, the horror at Big Questions, in short the quasi-philistinism. The paradoxical result is that both virtues and vices have been utterly trivialised: the sensibleness has been incorporated into an absurdly mechanical routine; and the philistinism has become less an active humour than a sullen and carping mood. It is the difference between the tone of the older "no nonsense!" and the newer "nonsense!"—the one impatient to get things done, the other wearily explaining *ex post facto* that the things that were done, were not well done.

The English tradition in philosophy always managed to be extraordinarily productive as well as distinctively English; it answered, or tried to answer, all sorts of important questions; and it aimed at world honours—to establish universal truths that would command a universal assent. Today, the heirs to this tradition have resigned from the game and are content to play the rôle of the fifth man at bridge. They will always tell you why the contract went down, but they never take a hand. Sometimes they are acutely right; sometimes they are blindly wrong; but, human nature being what it is, they are always intolerable.

IT IS not clear whether these British philosophers have withdrawn from the world, or whether they are honestly unaware of its existence. Whatever the case, the effect of parochialness is striking. There are plenty of footnotes in this volume. Mostly they are to essays and books by other members of the school—though William Wordsworth and Lewis Carroll, having been quoted, get their credits too. But I did not

find a single reference to contemporary American, or French, or German philosophers. When Mr. W. J. Rees, in his essay on "The Theory of Sovereignty Restated," refers to "the traditional" theory of sovereignty, it takes us some pages to discover that he means Austin, Dicey, Bryce, Bosanquet, T. H. Green, *et al*—no foreigners allowed. When "the history of political theory" is mentioned, the odds are that what is meant is the history of political theory in England between Hobbes and T. H. Green. When Mr. Renford Bambrough in the course of a discussion of "Plato's Political Analogies," refers to "recent work on the origin of philosophical problems and doctrines," it turns out that what he has in mind are articles that have appeared in British philosophical journals. Sometimes this can be serious as well as peculiar: Margaret Macdonald's essay on "Natural Rights" would have been much improved if, instead of reinventing the pragmatist theory of valuation, she had taken notice of the work of John Dewey and his disciples—and of his critics, too.

There is a cool complacency in these essays; not a stammer to distinguish one well-bred voice from another, no real discussion, only the pitter-patter of public instruction. The modest "I suggest" followed by a platitude; the difference between *necessary* conditions and *sufficient* conditions, always italicised lest we miss the point; the distinction between *can* and *must*, or *must* and *ought*, again always italicised—is this what goes on in *learned* journals (my italics this time)? It is understandable that they should talk down to us; but it is surprising to find them talking down to one another, as from a rostrum.

I do not mean to imply that these men are arrogant. On the contrary, their humility is positively alarming. True, they act as if they know it all; but they insist that the all does not amount to very much. This book introduces us to a new kind of political philosopher, one with a deep anti-political bias, who violently disclaims not only political intentions but political wisdom as well. I do not know a parallel—outside of certain religious sects—for a group of thinkers so vigorously denying any special competence to their political opinions; usually it is the reverse. All they claim is some skill in analysing the rhetoric of—not politicians, God forbid! but—other political philosophers. Unfortunately they are not always too impressive at that, because if they are good at logic they are poor at history, and are inclined to take it for granted that the textbook's summary of, say, Rousseau or Hegel or Hobbes is what these thinkers really had in mind. But more important than any passing deficiency is their ultimate intention, which pushes modesty to the point of suicide: where

the New Criticism in literature tediously explains its texts, in philosophy the New Criticism smugly explains them away, and there is grave danger of philosophy in England becoming a subject without subject-matter. What, one wonders, is to happen to all those questions about the Good Society and Justice and Political Morality which, if they are only academic table-talk in England, are very substantial matters elsewhere in the world? It is certainly true that a great deal of nonsense has been spoken in their names. But there are more important things in life than not speaking nonsense; and a devotion to truth is not quite the same thing as a devotion to other men's fallacies. After one has pointed out that the word "law" is used in many different and confusing ways, there remains the problem of when a citizen has the right and duty to disobey the laws of his country—a real

and urgent problem in some parts of the world, but one which these political philosophers do not regard as any of their business.

A philosophy for Little England—I do not think that it is either a harsh or incorrect description of the state of mind behind the application of "linguistic analysis" to politics. It is a mind very much at home in the world, and its world is England, and its England is, if not the best of all possible worlds, then at least the most English of all possible worlds—far more English, indeed, than the real England of the real world. Its England is civil beyond description; not to be tempted into foreign entanglements; neat and tidy and self-satisfied. In less fortunate countries, men may dream of the City of God, or have nightmares of the underworld. These happy few have placidly settled in their new towns; their lives are unhaunted, and their sleep is dreamless.

Irving Kristol

## 'TWIXT HEAVEN AND HELL

WYNDHAM LEWIS started his literary career with a *blast* of "vivid and violent ideas." They were expressed sensationally with the avowed object of compelling the attention of the public. Late one evening in July 1914, he turned up, as I well remember, at a little party in Bayswater followed by a trotting procession of half a dozen members of the Rebel Art Centre each carrying a large volume under his arm—the first number of *Blast*, red-hot (magenta red) from the printers. And now, just forty-one years later, comes another *Blast*, still so full of "vivid and violent ideas" as to have shaken the BBC out of its dogmatic slumbers, inducing it to give some hours of Third Programme time to broadcasting *The Human Age*\*—one of its boldest and most sensible experiments.

The first part of *The Human Age*, *The Childermass*, was published in 1928. It is only now that with *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta* we have the continuation of this ambitious work, and I find it more significant, more splendid, than I had dared hope for. The whole will be a sort of grand finale and summing-up of all that Mr. Lewis has been thinking and doing in the last forty years.

I do not forget that during most of that time he has been as much painter as writer—producing massive abstract paintings, steely portraits,

and other graphic work neither quite abstract nor representational, which bodied forth his visual comments on reality. But the imagination that works in his painting is, of course, the same imagination as works in his writing, though in the latter we may be more aware of the extraordinary variety of his interests—so various indeed as to have been a handicap to his worldly success; he has again and again bewildered his publishers by doing something which nobody expected from him. In his first novel, *Tarr*, immature as it was, he struck an authentic Wyndham Lewis note which his admirers expected to hear again. In describing the unbalanced lives of a number of Bohemians living in Paris he stripped his characters to the bone and showed them talking, gibbering, gesticulating, in the precincts of art. He did something of the same kind in *The Apes of God*, though here he was less concerned to depict the passions of men and women as the hollowness, the grotesque absurdity of the self-conscious imitative social animal conspicuous in the decade following the first war. And then he would surprise his public by inadvertently writing a book on Hitler (before anyone knew much about Hitler) or on economics (on which he was not really an expert), or on international politics and bankers (about which he had queer ideas); and then more novels, varying in theme and quality; and slashing attacks on whatever at given moments excited his ire. He was an omnivorous reader and a prolific writer. But in whatever he did,

\* *The Human Age: II. Book 2, Monstre Gai; Book 3, Malign Fiesta.* By WYNDHAM LEWIS. Methuen. 30s.