

the past. Still, to the very end he matched "theory and *praxis*", his actions with his beliefs. With Albert Camus he launched the successful European campaign against the death penalty. As a

vice-president of EXIT he demanded the freedom to choose one's death in dignity: and he took his own life, when illness had begun to ravage his body.

An American Appreciation

Cold Warrior

By Sidney Hook

New York City

IF *Darkness at Noon* were the only thing Arthur Koestler had written he would still have been one of the great figures of our time. His book served as a compelling text in political education. It achieved, gradually and in the face of inner resistance, what all the arguments and evidence we marshalled to prove the falsity of the Moscow Trials failed to do.

Those of us who helped organise the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials were too sanguine about the effects of the pronouncement of the Dewey Commission on public consciousness even in the United States. The massive volume *Not Guilty!* in which the Commission declared its verdict, buttressed by the supporting analysis, made little impact. Despite its existence the Hollywood moguls dared to produce a motion picture, *Mission to Moscow*, based upon the memoirs of the ignorant and empty-headed US ambassador to the Soviet Union, Joseph Davies, in which he declared that the Moscow Trials defendants (and tens of thousands of other victims of Stalin's purges) had all been Hitler's "fifth-columnists" in the Soviet Union. In the light of this cinematographic triumph, abetted by influential fellow-travellers and Soviet apologists, who transformed the Kremlin's involuntary cobelligerency into an alliance of democratic freedom-loving peoples, pettifogging details about contradictory avowals at the Moscow Trials could be brushed aside, and the complete absence of documentary and other material evidence ignored.

So far as I have been able to observe, only Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* was able to convey the sickening truth, overcoming by its psychological plausibility the initial doubts and resistance of Communist sympathisers. In some intellectual circles, paradoxically enough, Koestler was hated all the more for it. This was particularly true in France. In 1948 and 1949 I found the French intellectuals, particularly those under the influence of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, singular-

ly indifferent to the evidence about the Moscow Trials. They simply refused to discuss it. But they hated and defamed Koestler whose book had just been translated into French. For it drove them from denial of the fact that the defendants had confessed to non-existent crimes, to justifications and apologetic rationalisations for systematic lies on behalf of the deeper necessary truths of the Soviet Communist cause. The literal fact that Bukharin had been tortured into portraying himself as an enemy of the Revolution he had helped into birth paled before the "symbolic truth" that his differences with Stalin had imperilled the Soviet Union. A similar development took place with respect to the existence of Soviet concentration camps.

Koestler was hated because he made the horde of Communist fellow-travellers begin to choke on the official Soviet lies. Those who finally managed to swallow the lies at the cost of a permanent queasiness were convulsed by nausea when Khrushchev delivered his shattering speech in 1956 before the XXth Congress of the Russian Communist Party. They never forgave Koestler.

Koestler seemed to arouse a greater antagonism among non-Communists, particularly Oxbridge intellectuals, than almost all other former Communists. I was always struck by the difference in attitude they displayed towards Ignazio Silone even when Silone and Koestler were engaged in common political activities. Koestler had endured as much, if not more, than Silone in the struggle against Fascism. And it was Silone who had said, I believe even before Koestler, that the "final struggle would be between Communists and ex-Communists." The kernel of truth in this remark was that the ex-Communists knew the face and mind of the enemy much better than the liberal or conservative or reactionary opponents of communism. The latter not only failed to understand a politics based on a *Weltanschauung* but what slogans like "Peaceful Coexistence" and "*détente*" actually mean to the Kremlin. Someone who took seriously Leninist strategy for

"exploiting contradictions", say an "ex-Communist" in the British entourage sent to Yugoslavia (instead of James Klugman and his friends), would never have connived with Tito to help bring his country into the Kremlin's orbit; an "ex-Communist" at Roosevelt's side, having paid some attention to the history of Bolshevism, might have taught him at Yalta and Teheran that in dealing with Stalin he was not facing another Tammany boss like Jim Farley; an "ex-Communist", sensitised to Kremlin and Comintern deviousness, would have prevented Truman from coming home from Potsdam with a sector of Berlin which had no guaranteed corridor of access. . . .

None the less Silone enjoyed a political esteem denied to Koestler. This was partly due to Silone's detached and gentle manner, his air of an unbelieving Christian. Koestler was a completely engaged and passionate partisan who wanted to carry the war for freedom to the enemy, not by arms, but by debate and confrontation in the hope (despite his declared views about the irrational) that argument and evidence would weaken, if it did not win back, the allegiance of those supporters of the Communist line who still could be moved by Western ideals and achievements, and who were not yet seduced by Soviet power or blinded by anti-American resentment.

There was, however, a deeper reason. Silone remained a Socialist, and most other former Communists became Social-Democrats. But Koestler was cured of all Socialist illusions by his bitter experience with the Communist movement. The very idea of socialism in whatever benign form became suspect to him. He did not make a fetish of the free-enterprise system as did Max Eastman, nor did he develop the Dostoevskian Christianity of Whittaker Chambers, although he appreciated the despair and agony which led Chambers to that outlook.¹ He did not want to counterpose any other social system or scheme to communism lest in the struggle some of the unlovely traits of the enemy would develop among its protagonists. He was content to invoke truth, decency, hatred of cruelty and hypocrisy in the crusade against communism. He summarily rejected not only God and capitalism but all varieties of democratic socialism. This was a strange view for a man as politically sophisticated as Koestler. It left him an embattled moral warrior. Realising that concrete political programmes and conflicts sooner or later led to compromises with truth, and the deceits and hypocrisies of virtue, he finally abandoned the

field of politics altogether. The failure to see the simple, passionate morality in Koestler's political judgments led many who should have admired him to distrust him, and to misunderstand the real grounds of his anti-communism.

KOESTLER SOMETIMES made it difficult for others to see this. I recall that the first time we met in New York shortly before an important Italian election in which he feared the effects of a Communist Party victory on the political future of Europe, he lost his temper with me because I insisted upon talking about the economic situation in Southern Italy, and the necessity of Italian social reconstruction. He scornfully compared my concern with that of the English Labourites who had urged the reconstruction of the London slums as "the most effective way of stopping Hitler." First the Italian Communists had to be stopped at all costs; and then we would see. . . . Our positions didn't really differ, as he subsequently admitted in a handsome note of apology—which he often wrote after his emotional outbursts. He was always fearful that some other grand social illusion would get in the way of combating the greater evil.

TO OUR GREAT LOSS Koestler withdrew from active political life, and even from writing the political journalism in which his genius came to full flower. The ostensible reason was the political stupidity of the West, especially the United States and its stolid failure to "take the offensive for freedom." But the real reason, I suspect, was his realisation that he would have to compromise at some point or another his fierce moral indignation as soon as the struggle involved more than his pen. He was right in recognising that there is always a risk of becoming somewhat "like those we fight against" in the stratagems and deceits of political struggle—but it is a risk, and not a fatal necessity. Koestler was never happy with his withdrawal from politics. For he could not forget that the real choice in the defence of freedom was between the *intelligent* and *unintelligent* struggle against its enemies; and that the alternative of withdrawal, despite the posturing about non- or passive resistance to the heirs of Lenin and Stalin, was in effect acquiescence to their grand design.

Koestler's refusal to make moral compromises reflected itself in small things, and in the embarrassments and foolishness that seemed to attend him wherever he went—in his lecture tours in the United States, Japan, India, everywhere except Central Europe whose conventions he was brought up in. He would take umbrage at customs that he felt outraged his dignity and his exaggerated sense of fairness. It left his hosts feeling

¹ As William Buckley has noted (New York *Daily News*, 8 March 1983) "... when Whittaker Chambers published his book *Witness*, twelve years after *Darkness at Noon*, Chambers received from Koestler a single line: 'You did not return from Hell with empty hands.' ..."

Manifesto of Freedom (1950)

- 1 We hold it to be self-evident that intellectual freedom is one of the inalienable rights of man.
- 2 *Such freedom is defined first and foremost by his right to hold and express his own opinions, and particularly opinions which differ from those of his rulers. Deprived of the right to say "no", man becomes a slave.*
- 3 Freedom and peace are inseparable. In any country, under any régime, the overwhelming majority of ordinary people fear and oppose war. The danger of war becomes acute when governments, by suppressing democratic representative institutions, deny to the majority the means of imposing its will to peace.
Peace can be maintained only if each government submits to the control and inspection of its acts by the people whom it governs, and agrees to submit all questions immediately involving the risk of war to a representative international authority, by whose decision it will abide.
- 4 We hold that the main reason for the present insecurity of the world is the policy of governments which, while paying lip-service to peace, refuse to accept this double control. Historical experience proves that wars can be prepared and waged under any slogan, including that of peace. Campaigns for peace which are not backed by acts that will guarantee its maintenance are like counterfeit currency circulated for dishonest purposes. Intellectual sanity and physical security can only return to the world if such practices are abandoned.
- 5 *Freedom is based on the toleration of divergent opinions. The principle of toleration does not logically permit the practices of intolerance.*
- 6 No political philosophy or economic theory can claim the sole right to represent freedom in the abstract. We hold that the value of such theories is to be judged by the range of concrete freedom which they accord the individual in practice.
We likewise hold that no race, nation, class or religion can claim the sole right to represent the idea of freedom, nor the right to deny freedom to other groups or creeds in the name of any ultimate ideal or lofty aim whatsoever. We hold that the historical contribution of any society is to be judged by the extent and quality of the freedom which its members actually enjoy.
- 7 In times of emergency, restrictions on the freedom of the individual are imposed in the real or assumed interest of the community. We hold it to be essential that such restrictions be confined to a minimum of clearly specified actions; that they be understood to be temporary and limited expedients in the nature of a sacrifice; and that the measures restricting freedom be themselves subject to free criticism and democratic control. Only thus can we have a reasonable assurance that emergency measures restricting freedom will not degenerate into a permanent tyranny.
- 8 *In totalitarian states restrictions on freedom are no longer intended and publicly understood as sacrifice imposed on the people, but are on the contrary represented as triumphs of progress and achievements of a superior civilisation. We hold that both the theory and practice of these régimes run counter to the basic rights of the individual and the fundamental aspirations of mankind as a whole.*
- 9 We hold the danger represented by these régimes to be all the greater since their means of enforcement far surpasses that of all previous tyrannies in the history of mankind. The citizen of the totalitarian state is expected and forced not only to abstain from crime but to conform in all his thoughts and actions to a prescribed pattern. Citizens are persecuted and condemned on such unspecified and all-embracing charges as "enemies of the people" or "socially unreliable elements."
- 10 *We hold that there can be no stable world so long as mankind, with regard to freedom, remains divided into "haves" and "have-nots." The defence of existing freedoms, the reconquest of lost freedoms [and the creation of new freedoms] are parts of the same struggle.*
- 11 We hold that the theory and practice of the totalitarian state are the greatest challenge which man has been called on to meet in the course of civilised history.
- 12 *We hold that indifference or neutrality in the face of such a challenge amounts to a betrayal of mankind and to the abdication of the free mind. Our answer to this challenge may decide the fate of man for generations.*
- 13 [The defence of intellectual liberty today imposes a positive obligation: to offer new and constructive answers to the problems of our time.]
- 14 *We address this manifesto to all men who are determined to regain those liberties which they have lost and to preserve [and extend] those which they enjoy.*

* In his Danube Edition commentary to the Manifesto as reprinted in *The Trail of the Dinosaur* (1955, 1970), Koestler drily pointed out that "the words in square brackets were added to the draft by the British members of the editorial committee, Professor A. J. Ayer and Mr Hugh Trevor-Roper."

puzzled and hostile at his apparent rudeness and therefore completely insensitive to the political truths he had come to discourse about.

Koestler was in his element in the founding meeting of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in West Berlin when, with the outbreak of war in Korea (June 1950), it seemed as if the Kremlin would close its armoured grip on the surrounded and isolated half-city. He acted as a disciplined member of the steering committee, punctiliously attended sub-committee sessions, intervened effectively in three languages, showed an unwonted pragmatic disposition to compromise, and turned the other cheek to barbs hurled at him by some delegates who thought his formulations too sharp. Koestler offered a brace of papers that were productive of fruitful discussion. The first was on "Two Methods of Action." Its basic thesis was that at certain times and with respect to certain issues, instead of saying "*Neither-Nor*" and looking for other viable alternatives, we must recognise that our choice is limited to an "*Either-Or*." It was directed against the type of intellectual who in the mid-1930s would have exploded with indignation at those who absolved themselves from the necessity of taking a stand with the observation, "I am neither a Fascist nor an anti-Fascist", but who even now, in the face of the revelations of the enormity of Stalin's crimes and the growing threat of Communist aggression, were proclaiming "I am neither a Communist nor an anti-Communist." His second paper, "The Fake Dilemma", showed how far Koestler was from universalising dilemmatic situations. He decried the easy distinction between "Left" and "Right" as cognitively meaningless because of the varying emotive and historical connotations of the terms. And once we turned away from conceptual structures, he denied that our viable practical choice was limited to either capitalism or socialism. In practice it was not *Either-Or* but *More-or-Less*. In effect, although he did not phrase it this way, in our time the mode of political decision was more fateful than the mode of economic production. (Unfortunately some delegates misconstrued this as an attack on democratic socialism.)

To Koestler we also owe most of the memorable Freedom Manifesto of 1950. Its provisions were hammered out in committee meetings, some of them quite hectic. But the animating spirit and major formulations were his. [See text in adjoining box.] It was a great loss to the Congress that despite his role in its organisation he withdrew from all activity within a year or two. He became convinced that it had become diverted from its educational-political task by its other cultural (art, music) activities.

THERE WAS MUCH MORE TO Arthur Koestler than his role of embattled cold warrior. Our relations were

Iain Hamilton KOESTLER

"Here Koestler is, authentically, the sacred—always, even now, the only one in step . . . The strength of Iain Hamilton's biography is that it made me recognise Koestler's greatness all over again. This isn't only a biography—it's a dazzled and delighted discovery."

John Braine

"Iain Hamilton's achievement is to show, and to some degree explain, an extraordinary personality. His own character shines through this sympathetic and brilliant study. To recreate Koestler is a not inconsiderable job."

John Vaizey, Listener

"The great merit of Mr Hamilton's book is that . . . it never fails to bring out that remarkable combination of creative energy, boundless knowledge and hard-edged logic."

Francis King, Sunday Telegraph

"What went before and what came after in the world Koestler helped to transform, the incisiveness of almost all his political writing, all this and much else is chronicled in Iain Hamilton's book. What about Koestler himself? . . . My answer is that the book is absorbing on this personal level too."

Michael Foot, Observer

"To anyone who cares about the battle of ideas in the twentieth century it is fascinating."

Paul Johnson,

Times Literary Supplement
£12.00

Secker &
Warburg

never close. He thought I was politically naive about Europeans, and sometimes too professorial and sophisticated in argument. He was at times irritable and abrasive in his rejoinders to my occasional criticism of his behaviour; but the more I learned about him directly and from others, the more I was impressed by his heroic qualities which he himself tried to do his best to deny and destroy. There is no need to describe his philanthropic dispensations under the seal of anonymity to refugee writers from Iron Curtain countries. He

always regarded these as small matters. But I vividly recall the remark made to me by one of Koestler's acquaintances who had been in a concentration camp with him. "He found me boring and took few pains to conceal it, but when the pinch came he put his life on the line for me—when no one else did." He was an exemplary European "freedom-fighter", loyal, courageous, conscientious, self-sacrificing.

In what matters most Arthur Koestler could always be counted upon. His end became him.

An English Appreciation

In the Tradition of Daniel Defoe

By Maurice Cranston

London

IF ANY WRITER of our generation is still being read in the distant future that writer will surely be Arthur Koestler. No other writer lived so fully and intensely a uniquely 20th-century experience, touching the extremes, and producing in his books the feel of what it has all been like. He may even be better understood and more appreciated in the future than he is at present, for his books have been too close to the nerve for many people in our time to accept them without a certain resistance.

It is often said of Arthur that he was the best foreign writer of English prose since Joseph Conrad. And he was. But Arthur was a very different kind of novelist. Conrad was undoubtedly very important, but the political dimension is ambiguous; he gives us certain intimations of the travail of Western empires on the fringes of barbarism, but it is all very indirect and allusive. Koestler's works are, by contrast, wholly direct and unequivocal. You know where he stands; there is no mistaking what he has to say. There are very few writers who have succeeded as he did in transforming the raw material of violent political experience—of conspiracy, revolution, oppression, and war—into literature. If we think of Malraux or Sartre we see raw facts overwhelmed by vast metaphysical constructions. Arthur Koestler was more like Daniel Defoe: a writer who abolished the frontier between journalism and literature after he had passed through the fires of revolutionary action, plotting, fighting, the pillory and prison, without losing his robust good sense, his nose for evidence, and his desire to get things down just as they had happened.

But even in the case of Daniel Defoe, the best books came in the second half of his life, in the relative tranquillity of Georgian England, whereas in

Koestler's case it is the early books, written in the heat of the worst events, written in the era of the Third Reich and of Stalin, Franco, and Pétain, that appear to reach the higher peaks of literature.

Darkness at Noon, that undisputed and indisputable classic, must have been completed before Arthur was released from Pentonville Prison in 1940. It was written in an environment as unfavourable to creative writing as anyone can imagine: in circumstances which he himself describes in *Scum of the Earth*, that haunting narrative of a Jewish refugee on the run from Hitler and Hitler's all-too-willing collaborators. Arthur once told me that he did not need a study in which to write a book. He said he learned the trade as a newspaperman. "You have to put so many words on the page by a certain hour, and you do it—whatever the distraction. . . ." This was perhaps an advantage he derived from having had a scientific education at a *Realschule* rather than a classical education; it had made him a "practical" writer. I think a good deal of romance and highly-strung aesthetic intensity went into Arthur's living, but his writing was a no-nonsense affair. The kind of truth he was out to communicate was a plain truth: and this is one thing that made his books so singular—for he wrote them at a time when Western political culture was dominated by half-truths, illusions, lies, self-deception, wishes, fears, yearnings and fantasies; and unfortunately it still very largely is.

ONE PART of the greatness of *Darkness at Noon* is that it is the only book of its time which stripped off all the veils of ideology under which the Soviet régime was hidden; we had to wait for Solzhenit-