

breakup and breakdown, and he welcomed what he called “the bankruptcy of *idées générales*”, by which he meant the collapse of the old liberal values and norms.

No, justice was not what he was after, not old-fashioned justice with its finicky and never quite certain approaches to moral standards. His motto, taken from Hobbes, was: *auctoritas non veritas facit legem*: and for him it was always a matter of power which determined law. It shouldn’t be surprising that Carl Schmitt not only influenced the German Right; intellectuals on the Left, too, picked up ideas and images in order to strengthen their recent onslaught on the liberal-democratic state, as in the Marcuse school of critics of “pluralism.”³

THE TROUBLE WITH opportunism is that the opportunities for ambitious outsiders do not usually last very long. The true believers, and especially the long-time Party faithful, are addicted to trusting only their very own (and not even them). The outsiders are always suspect, soon distrusted, quickly isolated, in the end rudely dropped. I think again of Ionesco’s hapless Bérenger who so much wanted to be a rhinoceros like the others, but wanting it didn’t make it so.

There were some who longed to see Carl Schmitt among the accused on trial in Nuremberg. But he was set free in 1947 and lived quietly in Westphalia, sharing his thoughts with the intellectual pilgrims who came to Plettenberg and who didn’t really believe, or allow themselves to be disturbed by, the indictment (as Günter Maschke noted in his obituary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) that he was a genuine collaborator with Nazi ideas; that he had any real responsibility for the death of the Weimar Republic;⁴ that he had turned his back on the traditional ideals of law and justice as exemplified in liberal and humane social orders. One such pilgrim conceded this much:

“... Schmitt’s answers to the great problems were in vain. But which political philosopher has fared any better? What always remains are the questions. . . .”

Pretty tentative stuff with which to memorialise a man who loved total confrontations and total solutions.

THERE IS A PASSAGE in the *Mémoires* of Raymond Aron which recalls his curiously impassioned defence of Carl Schmitt. Aron was generous enough to plead that “at no time

³ One could note that Walter Benjamin corresponded with him and wrote an essay about his theories before 1933. So did Hugo Ball, the co-founder of Dadaism. After the War the Left-liberal critic Rolf Schroers wrote a book, *Der Partisan*, inspired by Schmitt. One most interesting recent publication, edited by Jacob Taubes, is *Der Fürst dieser Welt: Carl Schmitt und die Folgen* (Paderborn, 1983).

⁴ “If”, Schmitt’s quoted remark on this subject runs:

“If I were the grave-digger, then the Republic must have already died, or someone else must have done her in. . . .”

Something less, surely, than a “total” clarification of the issue.

did Schmitt ever belong to the National-Socialist Party” and “as a man of high culture he couldn’t be a devotee of Hitler and, in fact, wasn’t. . . .” With all due respect to our late friend, Aron was in error on the first point. And as for the second, Carl Schmitt certainly gave over a period of some three years a very good imitation of being a devotee. I am afraid there was more than a touch of naivety in the notion that a man of “high culture” (*homme de haute culture* or, as the Germans say, *hohe Bildung*) could never bring himself to give personal support to a beastly and bloody despotism.

Culture and character have never been interchangeable.

Paris Notebook

By Jean-François Revel

Moscow as a Paper Tiger

WESTERN VIEWS OF the USSR since 1917, and of other Communist systems since 1945, seem to come round again with the monotonous regularity of a video-tape loop. On Communist imperialism—or, *per contra*, Communist willingness for coexistence—optimism and pessimism constantly alternate. Since 1980, the USSR and Communism have been judged with some severity in the democratic countries—not only, as is sometimes said, by a few intellectual ex-Marxists, but also by the public in general. In France, this can be seen in the opinion polls on the “image of the Soviet Union.” A majority in the West criticise the Communist system both as a failure in itself and as a threat to the rest of the world. Hence the support for a firm stand in negotiations with the East, despite the ardour of pacifist minorities.

Several recent signs, however, suggest that the pendulum is now beginning to swing the other way; anti-Sovietism may be *dépassé*, and going out of fashion again. Not that anyone seeks to rehabilitate the Communist system as an economic and social panacea: that task has become too difficult. Nor does anyone still champion the Soviet “peace-loving” professions: that too will no longer wash. No: the new argument claims that the USSR has become so weak that to fear it is quite unnecessary, if not rather absurd. The popularity of this thesis, which is not really very new—it was used in the past as a partial justification for *détente*—explains the welcome given to Régis Debray’s recent book, *Les empires contre l’Europe* (Gallimard). He portrays the Soviet empire as inefficient and crumbling, and he tempts us in various ways towards a very rosy estimate of the East-West balance of power.

In fact, according to Régis Debray, “East and West are

non-existent." The Atlantic group is "a world expanding", the Soviet group "a world contracting." How's that again? Has M. Debray been looking only at pre-War maps? or pre-1975 ones? By his account, the only imperialism to be feared is (here we go again) American imperialism (to which he also adds the conquering energy of Islam). Anyone still obsessed by Soviet power, it seems, is a victim of outworn Manichaeism. The perfidious power from across the Atlantic is "infiltrating European society": the clumsy Soviet power is "besieging it." To do him justice, Debray does not deny Soviet expansionism. He asserts, however, that the USSR lacks the means to achieve its ends. Soviet military might is pasteboard. The Americans—automatically suspect—produce "outrageously inflated" estimates of the Soviet nuclear or conventional arsenal, of the Soviet navy, or of the number of Soviet soldiers, all miserable weaklings. Expansion in Africa? A special initiative of Castro's, which Moscow couldn't restrain. The Sovietisation of Central Europe after 1945? Really a response to the will of the people: certainly not the spirit of conquest. The greatest danger for us Europeans, it seems, comes from . . . the *Reader's Digest*. Why? "It's because the Afghans have never read *Reader's Digest* and have remained themselves that they are able to fight against Mig 25s." In other words, the Russians represent a threat for Europe only because our spirits have been somehow sapped by their objective ally (*Reader's Digest*).

Turning to more concrete matters, Debray quotes as proof of American imperialism—the only true imperialism, according to him—the "fact" that US military spending has increased by 40% in three years. In reality, he has confused the Administration's requests to Congress with what it has actually secured. For the coming year, for example, it has obtained a zero increase—and in practice less than zero, since the figures finally voted by Congress will no doubt fail to match the pace of inflation. Ah, Debray would answer, quibbles about figures are less significant than "the decline of Communism", now on its last legs ideologically and politically. That may well be so; but, diplomatically and strategically, it's still alive and kicking.

RÉGIS DEBRAY IS NOT ALONE in his optimism about the supposed weakness of the USSR. He has a curious ally in—M. Raymond Barre. In a long statement in *Politique internationale* (No. 27, Spring 1985), the former Prime Minister "rejects the idea of the USSR as a Superpower", and so "finds it hard to imagine that the USSR is ready to take additional risks." The fact that, between 1975 and 1980, 100 million people have come under direct or indirect Soviet influence "is not the result of *détente*." What about Afghanistan? On that subject, he says, "one cannot limit oneself to brief and hasty judgments." The USSR had not planned its invasion; it was "caught up in a process beyond its control." M. Barre seems not to have noticed that this "process" resulted from a Soviet *coup d'état* which sought to impose a Communist government on Kabul, followed by the need to prop it up when the people rejected it. In his view—and it is astonishing that so intelligent a man should resort to

this old bromide—"the USSR has always suffered from a siege mentality." Presumably it is showing this again today in its repeated ultimata to Pakistan, by which it no doubt feels suddenly "encircled." In plain terms, Gorbachev is demanding that Pakistan expel Afghan refugees and send them back to be massacred by the Red Army (whose delicate methods of repression in Afghanistan have just been revealed in a United Nations report).

What could be more surprising?—Régis Debray is a disciple, not of François Mitterrand, but of Raymond Barre! Disquieting rumours were already circulating about the former Prime Minister. In Switzerland one day, he was reported as saying that the Iron Curtain had disappeared. In Brittany, he apparently reproached the President for "combining the traditional vices of French policy—Atlanticism and anti-Sovietism." M. Barre is too good a politician to attribute any sense to these abstractions. Is "anti-Sovietism" the reason why people regard the USSR as imperialist? Or does one become anti-Soviet because the USSR behaves in an imperialist way? Pure scholasticism: and the way out is to look at the facts. Have arms limitation agreements slowed down the Soviet military build-up—yes or no? Do Warsaw Pact troops possess chemical weapons—yes or no? And what of NATO's troops? For the past ten years, have the Soviets shown that they respect their Helsinki promises on human rights?

Raymond Barre merely says: "We must see to it that the commitments undertaken in Basket 3 are respected, and continually recall what they are." Dazzled by the decade-long success of this bold policy, one may well ask what concrete meaning M. Barre attaches to the words "We must see to it that. . . ." Again, is it "simple Manichaeism" that puzzles the reader when M. Barre (who knows English perfectly well) declares (on page 8) that he wants *détente* to be "indivisible"—and (on page 17) that he is opposed to "linkage"? In both languages, the two words mean the same: e.g., that the USSR cannot simultaneously pursue *détente* in Europe and destabilisation in the Near East, in Africa, in Latin America, and in Central Asia. So, in the end, what should we do? Close our eyes? Or react? And if so, how? Or should we simply decree that the danger is really, after all, quite imaginary?

AS FOR "Atlanticism"—if one's against it, ought one to leave the Alliance? Playing straight, Debray faces that crucial question. Should France quit the Atlantic Pact? Against all his argument's logic, he answers No. Yet why stay, if the USSR is no longer a threat? It seems strange to produce a theoretical analysis pointing in one direction, then draw practical conclusions which point the other way. According to M. Barre, the Alliance is based on a copybook maxim: the Americans defend Europe (he contends) because it is in their own interest to do so. But if defence has become superfluous, why do we allow America to go on providing it, when all it does is irritate the peace-loving Soviets? Any member state, after all, can quit the Pact when it pleases, leaving either its integrated command or the alliance itself.

For this reason it's hard to see why the Spaniards, for example, demonstrate "against Reagan" instead of against each other. Spanish membership of NATO was approved in 1982 by a Parliament elected by universal suffrage. What one majority had done, another could undo—but has taken good care not to. Nor has it called membership in question by referendum. Now the Socialist Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez has obviously changed his mind: he wants to remain within the Alliance. Shouldn't Spaniards who disagree take their case to him?

WHAT IS REMARKABLE about European attitudes is how little they reflect real facts, and how much they stem from our own psychological needs. Among "experts", attitudes seem to change like skirt-lengths: one must have a little novelty number for the next meeting. Among politicians, attitudes often derive from the fear of having to draw conclusions from facts—facts like the extent of Soviet spying, revealed in 1983, when a corner of the veil was lifted, and 47 spies were expelled. Equally taboo, for the most part, is the Soviet role in international terrorism. Many statesmen prefer to turn

aside from the danger, to avoid looking it in the face and doing something about it. How often our theories (can it always be by chance?) seem to encourage inertia! Régis Debray, for example, is right to point out the rude pressures from Islam, but wrong to fancy that they eclipse Communist expansionism. The "two forms of imperialism" don't cancel each other out: they add to one another—as can be seen in Lebanon, Chad, and the Yemen. There may be surprises in Iran, too, when Ayatollah Khomeini goes. The tacit anti-Western alliance of Islam and Communism works very well, so long as the USSR does not try to impose by force, as in Afghanistan, a régime modelled on its own.

It is always easier to see the Soviet Union as we should wish it than to adjust our policies to what it is. When M. Barre declares that "*La France doit avoir une politique étrangère qui couvre l'Est et l'Ouest*", he is stating the obvious. The only interesting question is what he means by "covering the East." It would be perilous indeed if it meant swallowing the most optimistic theses about the USSR.

The real point of denying the problem is, as with Régis Debray, to avoid having to try to solve it.

Dilucidación

Si señor, sure we har claiming the
bomb as Glorious Blow by
Forces of Liberate Dark
Dictate Oppression. Too long

far have we, fathers and handfathers
forced to Slavery lifes hwich
Army of Liberate fight
struggles till all mens are dead!

Down with the generalísimo!
(not the present or last hwon,
only the hwon pefore last),
Viva la Muerte!, señor,

Viva el excelentísimo
Señor conde de Torre-
gamberro! Yes sirs my friend,
what is the matter that some

dies for the Cause of the hwons that is
thinking right in this matters?
This she's Political's War.
Sure what are some person lifes?

We not Guerrillas amigo but
Counter-Anti-Guerrilla
them was our Leaders but now—
those is our Enemy, si,

ow you say por favor now they has
showed False Ideologics.

Terrorist Actions too bad;
this why we take such Campaigns!

This very Positive Actions she
may have kill some who have no
doings with Rebels but so?
Bombs she not go off for fun.

Don't say amigo you not with the
understandings of why we
fights in montañas of South?
This are the struggles to death!

OK so 20 am dead and some
shrapnels goes to some peoples—
we har of People's own blood!
This is of why we shall fight!

Last bomb was not our bomb *that* was bomb
blown hwen Traitor who carries
gets it hexplosure too soon
killing himself and some mans.

Somehow you get mix up, señor, you
see we Neutral in all thing
this hwy the reasons hwe fights!
Freedoms to Governmans Farce!

Same Costa Rica but also with
Nicaraguan Border!
Now you mus hunderstand well
which why this bombs must hexplode.

Peter Reading

BOOKS & WRITERS

Perfection of the Life

E. M. Forster's Letters—By K. W. GRANSDEN



IN 1923 FORSTER wrote to Siegfried Sassoon about *A Passage to India*, with which he was having difficulties: "I shall never write another novel after it—my patience with ordinary people has given out. But I shall go on writing. I don't feel any decline in my 'powers'."

He was as good as his word. He wrote far more books after 1923 than before it, but never another novel. But the explanation he offers there needs to be taken together with another, earlier comment to Sassoon (2 May 1918) *à propos* a short story:

"It's not that I'm off writing, but I can't any more put words between inverted commas and join them together with 'said' and an imaginary proper name."

How completely characteristic of this "elusive" writer (as the critics used never to tire of labelling him) to provide us with two theories of why he got stuck with fiction, one technical, one social or psychological. Of the two, the socio-psychological one will perhaps most astonish the reader of these letters¹ (when a craftsman gives a technical reason why he can't do something the layman has virtually no choice but to accept it). But no more patience with ordinary people? It might, I suppose, be said that the wide circle of friends and relations fortunate enough to be recipients of these letters do not constitute, by any definition of the term, "ordinary" people. One's friends are never ordinary, and it can be said of Forster, more than of most people, that he conferred distinction upon even his most distinguished friends by virtue of his friendship ("Human beings can't be dull if I find them interesting . . .").

Nor are the addressees represented in these two volumes exclusively, or even predominantly, drawn from the ranks of the famous and the public (though in Vol. 2 there are

inevitably more of these). His most self-revealing letters are arguably those to his mother, Florence Barger, and Bob Buckingham (the last-named does not appear at all until Vol. 2). There are also far more of these personal letters, though statistics must be handled, as ever, with care. Out of an estimated 15,000 letters written during his lifetime the editors have found room for just 446.

He had, of course, what most of us now lack—time. Though always busy, he never had a regular nine-to-five job, and he was able through his correspondence not only to give pleasure to those he wrote to, and now to us, but to explore ways of working out his own problems and stresses whether in life or art. Even if the selection here provided represents only about one-thirtieth of his estimated epistolary output, it reflects adequately, thanks to careful and experienced editing, Forster's extraordinary life-span, 86 years from the first letter to the last.

Many of the earliest letters are to his mother, and one catches something of the tone of anxious hypochondria (his own health improved steadily as he grew older, as not infrequently happens, and his mother too lived to ninety) which we find also in the relationship between Rickie and his mother in *The Longest Journey*: and something else, not physical:

"My cold is much better, nearly well, so is my cough . . . but I feel very nervous somehow. I don't know why it is, perhaps it is excitement, but lately I have always been taking the dark side of things. I have never been like it before, but it is not at all nice. . . . It is not so bad in the day time as at night, then I cry a lot. I also have a kind of foreboding that something dreadful will happen before the holidays. . . . The worst of school is, you have nothing and nobody to love, if only I had somebody. . . ."

That *cri de coeur* of 1890 (letter 12) expresses in the simplest possible terms a life's quest, but it is seldom in the early letters that his guard is down, and when it is, the result is not self-pity but the sharpness of truth. But the mutual concern for health and welfare continues through the Cambridge years and beyond ("I often wonder about your rheumatism, but feel sure you will never let me know if it is bad, in case of worrying me", he writes, at the start of a long and brilliant description of a visit to Peshawar, 12 November 1912, and examples could be multiplied). The early letters

¹ *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*. Edited by MARY LAGO and P. N. FURBANK. Vol. I, 1879-1920. Collins (1983), £15.95. Vol. II, 1921-1970. Collins (1985), £17.50.