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THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES¹

I

AT the beginning of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Stendhal has a memorable description of the liberation of Milan from Austrian rule. It is 1796, and the young Bonaparte, fresh from the brilliant victory at the Bridge of Lodi, has entered the city at the head of his revolutionary army 'which, having just won six battles and conquered twenty provinces, was fully equipped except for shoes, trousers, coats and hats':

'At once a new and passionate social atmosphere materialized. An entire people realized on the fifteenth of May, 1796, that everything they had respected until then was utterly absurd, if not downright hateful. The withdrawal of the last Austrian regiment marked the downfall of the old ideas; to risk one's life became fashionable. Everyone began to live only to be happy after centuries of hypocrisy and dulness, every one felt he must love something passionately and be prepared to risk his neck for it. The interminable, suspicious despotism of Charles V and Philip II had plunged the Lombards in deepest night; now their statues were overturned and suddenly everything was flooded with light. For half a century, while the Encyclopedists and Voltaire had been enlightening France, the monks had dinned it into the good people of Milan that to learn to read or any other worldly pursuit was useless bother, and that if one paid one's tithes punctually to the priest and confessed one's little sins, one was practically sure to go to heaven . . . The exaltation was so excessive and widespread that I can explain it only by this profound historical reflection: these people had been bored for a century.'

So it was in the springtime of the bourgeois revolution. Last fall another army arrived in another land ruled by reaction. For the victory at Lodi, the deal with Darlan. For the ragged regiments

¹ Last of a series of articles on 'The New Failure of Nerve,' in *Partisan Review*.

commanded by a twenty-seven year old genius, the vast fleets bearing a formidably equipped host commanded by generals, neither young nor geniuses. For the fresh breeze of freedom, the perpetuation of the stale atmosphere of Vichy. When Bonaparte entered Milan in 1796, the Marquis del Dongo fled to his country estate; when Eisenhower entered Algiers in 1942, the men of Vichy entertained his officers at their clubs. Bonaparte brought along a young artist who gave the delighted Milanese the first political cartoon they had ever seen: a drawing of a French soldier slitting the belly of a rich landowner, from which poured not blood but wheat. Eisenhower brought along Col. Darryl F. Zanuck, late of Hollywood. Eisenhower's army was as 'non-political'—in the sense that the reactionary anti-Semite, Giraud, is non-political—as Bonaparte's was political. One might have expected an army of the Four Freedoms to begin with the liberation of the native population. But Eisenhower's first communiqué states: 'The forces under my command bring with them a solemn assurance that the French North African Empire will remain French.' His subordinate, General Patton, defined the modest aim of the American forces as the maintenance of 'political as well as economic normality' in North Africa. Rarely before in history has so vast a physical force been deployed with such tragically—or comically, perhaps—small political results.

It is ironical that the first great American military venture in the war, a coup hailed by the liberals at the time as a 'turning-point', should have proven to be such indeed, but a turning away from their values. What the French collapse of 1940 revealed about European bourgeois democracy, the North African campaign revealed about its American counterpart.

When I wrote 'The (American) People's Century' last summer, there was still a good deal of illusion about the democratic war aims. In the year since then, however, the positive idealism which was dominant in the first part of the war, as expressed in the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, and Wallace's 'People's Revolution' speeches, has been superseded by a new line. As military victory comes closer, the philanthropic slogans can be honourably discharged: they have done their 'bit', or tried to, and might prove embarrassing if permitted to survive into the peace-conference stage. There is also a broader consideration: the antagonism between actual policies and formal

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principles has become too acute to be bridged by even the most powerful propaganda. In England since last summer, the Tories have so consolidated their control of the Government that the Labour Party ministers dare not support the Beveridge Plan; Cripps has been squeezed dry and thrown aside; Gandhi has been jailed and the Congress Party has been temporarily defeated. In this country, the fall elections returned the most conservative Congress since 1933; the new taxes are regressive, food prices rise sharply, wages are frozen, profits enormous; the unions have become instruments of Governmental control, and the Administration and Congress are using the mine strike as an occasion for still further weakening labour; the Negroes are jimcrowed as much as ever in military and civilian life; big business is more powerful than ever, and its representatives have excluded almost completely both labour men and New Dealers from the policy-making level of the war agencies; foreign policy has been increasingly determined by the reactionary State Department. As a former radical leader remarked recently, 'This time we're getting the post-war disillusionment during the war'.

A nation fighting the kind of war the French Revolutionary armies fought, or the Red Army in 1919, does all it can to *politicalize* the struggle. It is notable that everything possible is done by our leaders to *de-politicalize* this war. As it grinds automatically on, as it spreads and becomes more violent, the conflict becomes less and less meaningful, a vast nightmare in which we are all involved and from which whatever hopes and illusions we may have had have by now leaked out. Some weeks ago, the Office of War Information issued directives to its propagandists on 'the nature of the enemy'. He was described as a bully, a murderer, a thief, a gangster, etc., but only once in the lengthy document as a *fascist*. Soviet Russia has never pretended to be fighting for any international socialist ideals, but simply for national survival—the 'Great Patriotic War', as the official slogan has it. The recent dissolution of the Comintern was Stalin's effort to wash his regime clean of even the smell of any general principles. With his usual cynical boldness, Dr. Goebbels expresses the new line: 'To date, from the national viewpoint, we have fought only for illusory objectives—for the House of Prussia, or Hapsburg; for socialism and for national socialism; for questions of proletariat or bourgeoisie.' But today it is for important things

we are fighting: for coal, for iron, for petroleum, and above all, for daily bread'. The German Army fights on because it is—an army. The people at home support the war—endure the war might be more accurate—because they rightly fear an even more terrible Versailles if the other side wins. The unreality of the 'Democracy-vs.-Slavery' propaganda of the United Nations is exposed by their inability to appeal politically to the masses of enslaved Nazi Europe. The best wisdom of our war leaders is that it will take x tons of bombs to reduce y acres of European cities to rubble.

The increasing *unconscious* character of the war—in the sense that the policies of the United Nations express no positive ideology or principles but merely an opportunistic adaptation to a reactionary *status quo*—coming as it does on top of twenty years of defeat of democratic and radical forces, has had its effect on American intellectual life. 'Le 2 décembre m'a physiquement dépolitiqué', wrote Baudelaire after Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*. 'Il n'y a plus d'idées générales . . . Si j'avais voté, je n'aurais pu voter que pour moi.'¹ 'There are no more general ideas'—what better describes the intellectual atmosphere today? Most political thinking has abandoned not only the old optimism of progress, but also the very notion of any consistent attempt to direct the evolution of society in a desirable direction. Submission to the brute force of events, choice between evils rather than between positive programmes, a scepticism about basic values and ultimate ends, a refusal to look too far ahead—this is the mood. But history evolves, the world changes in one direction or another, whether we dare to be conscious of it or not. What I want to do in this article, therefore, is to try to relate the values most of us hold to (1) the historical situation, and (2) current political programmes.

II

The system of values which has been slowly, painfully built up since the end of the Middle Ages, and which has commanded

¹ I owe this quotation to Meyer Schapiro's 'Courbet and Popular Imagery' (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3 & 4, 1941) which is in part a study of the effect of 1848 on French writers and artists. It is remarkable, by the way, how many of the issues of this period (and the intellectual reactions to them) anticipate those of our own time.

general assent since the eighteenth century, is today threatened as never before. These values, which achieved political reality in the American and French revolutions, are crystallized around the free development of the individual. I would roughly summarize them—and the concepts which are organically linked with them—as follows:

‘**MATERIALISM:** The substitution of this-worldly for other-worldly criteria in all fields. Man is the measure of all values, and his happiness and self-fulfilment here on earth the aim and justification of all institutions. Reason and science are substituted for traditional or mystical modes of thought.

‘**HUMAN NATURE:** Man is by nature perfectible and has been corrupted by bad institutions. Good institutions will permit the individual to develop his human potentialities. From this optimistic view of human nature flow two related beliefs: (a) *Fraternity*, all men are brothers, wars are stupid and immoral; (b) *Education as a Panacea*, if man is corrupted only by his environment, it follows he will be able to progress if he is taught the truth.

‘**DEMOCRACY:** The State exists for man, not vice versa. “Man” means the majority of citizens. Jefferson wonderfully summarizes the theory in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, [deriving their powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government] . . .”¹

‘**PROGRESS:** There is a pattern in history, and it is a progressive, not a cyclical pattern. This progress, which is thought of as materialistic, is desirable: it is good in itself to produce more,

¹ The words in brackets are omitted from this passage as it is inscribed on the walls of the recently opened Jefferson Memorial in Washington. The omission—they had to break a sentence in the middle to do it—is a commentary on what has happened to the values of 1776 in this age. As is, for that matter, the whole pompous, costly and tasteless Memorial, more suitable to one of the late Roman Emperors than to our greatest revolutionary democrat.

to extend man's mastery over nature. The process is also inevitable: man is able to solve problems, to advance towards a better life.'

These were the values of the revolutionary wing of eighteenth-century political thought—Rousseau, Paine, Jefferson, Robespierre. The conservative wing—Locke, Montesquieu, the American Constitutionalists—differed only on Democracy, being distrustful of majority-rule and preferring oligarchy. It was the revolutionary ideology which won out, and which still dominates our culture—in a more sophisticated and less naïvely optimistic form, of course. The neo-conservatives of our time, in attempting to revive the doctrines of Adams and Locke, exaggerate the differences between the two wings. Because they themselves reject the propositions on Materialism, Human Nature and Progress, they pretend there was a split all along the line in the eighteenth century. The actual situation is revealed in Randall's *The Making of the Modern Mind*:

'From the beginning of the century onward there rose one increasing pæan to progress through education. Locke, Helvetius and Bentham laid the foundations for this generous dream; all men of whatever school, save only those who clung like Malthus to the Christian doctrine of original sin, believed with all their ardent natures in the perfectibility of the human race. At last mankind held in its own hands the key to its destiny; it could make the future almost what it would. By destroying the foolish errors of the past and returning to a rational cultivation of nature, there were scarcely any limits to human welfare that might not be transcended.'

What has happened is that the above values have come into conflict with the actual development of capitalism, and, as always, it is the values and not the productive system which are giving way. Worse, those developments which had seemed to be steps towards the realization of these values appear today as their executioners. The great liberating power of the last two centuries, the growth of the forces of production, which turned men's eyes from heaven to earth and created the material plenty out of which a humanistic culture and ethics could grow, this has now become, by a dialectical turn, the new enslaver. Man has learned to master nature so well that we use the most advanced technology to blast to bits the fabric of culture. Art museums, hospitals, vast

industrial works, ancient churches and modernistic housing projects, whole historic cities like Warsaw, Coventry, Cologne, and Nuremberg—all are being destroyed with the most admirable efficiency week after week, month after month. Everyone can read and write, popular education is a reality—and so the American masses read pulp fiction and listen to soap operas on that triumph of technology, the radio, and the German and Russian masses are the more easily indoctrinated with a lying and debased official culture. The freeing of man to develop himself has had the effects which Erich Fromm described in *Escape from Freedom*: craving to be rid of this empty 'freedom', the masses turn neurotically to totalitarian Leaders. The struggle for universal suffrage is won, and the result is the rise of plebescitary dictatorships, in which the State authority becomes sacred precisely because it claims to represent 'the People' against the individual. Far from decreasing in power, as all progressive thinkers from Jefferson to Marx and Lenin hoped and believed it would, the State is becoming an end in itself, subjugating the human being as the Church did in the Middle Ages. In the new religion of the State, which has reached full growth in Germany and Russia and which is steadily growing here, the individual is once more frozen into the hierarchical, irrational pattern of a society based on status. The peoples of the world are being organized into vast power-States, military-socialist in form, which are devastating the globe in their internecine struggles.

III

It is natural there should be a 'new failure of nerve' in the face of such a situation. The bourgeois revolution has reached a dead end. Regression is manifest everywhere, culture goes obscurantist, politics become more and more totalitarian. There is a general retreat from the one basic philosophy and programme which both explains what has happened to the bourgeois revolutionary values and also opens up a road forward to their fulfilment. 'In its theoretical form,' writes Engels, 'modern socialism originally appears as a further and ostensibly more logical extension of the principles established by the great French philosophers of the eighteenth century. Like every new theory, it had at first to link itself on to the intellectual material which lay ready to its hand, however deep its roots lay in economic facts.' (*Anti-Duhring*,

p. 23.) Historically, Marxism is the continuation of the values of the bourgeois revolution, on which it drew for its sources of theory: English classical economics, French political theory, and Hegelian philosophy.¹ Marx and Engels quarrelled not at all with the values of 1776 and 1789, but only with the failure to realize them. Much is written today, often by those who should know better, about Marxism as a doctrine of dictatorship, an inhumanly reductive system. But what impresses me is precisely Marx's concern with human values, his instinct for the human 'point' of political and economic questions, as in such key concepts as the fetishism of commodities and the alienation of the worker from his work under capitalism. In substituting the working-class for the bourgeoisie, historical materialism for the naïve idealism of the eighteenth century, they were seeking the forces to carry to completion the aspirations of the Enlightenment. Their aim could have been subscribed to by Jefferson: a society 'in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

The modifications Marx made in the conceptions of the Eighteenth Century about human nature, democracy and progress were all in the direction of greater realism and sophistication. It is remarkable how often his analysis of human motivation anticipates Freud, for example. Most modern historians of significance, from Pirenne and Sombart to Beard, follow the materialistic interpretation first worked out by Marx. We live in pretty much the kind of world Marx and Engels thought we should be living in, failing socialist revolution: a world of wars, crises, mass unemployment, centralized power and general instability. The way the classic bourgeois values have today produced their very opposite does not mean they should now be abandoned, as the obscurantists claim. It is rather a tribute to the soundness of Marx's much-abused dialectical conception of history. Nor should one forget that Marx made his predictions at

¹ 'Marx, then, in developing his new socialist and proletarian science,' writes Karl Korsch in his valuable little book on Marx, 'took his cue from that early study of society which, although first communicated to him by Hegel, had really been born of the revolutionary epoch of the bourgeoisie.' The testimony of the modern obscurantists is also impressive: to writers like Drucker and Barzun, Marx is the anti-Christ, most wicked and potent of the followers of Rousseau, and the link between the French revolution and both fascism and Stalinism.

a time when almost all other social thinkers entertained the most absurd optimism as to the longevity, in fact the eternity of capitalism.

As anyone knows who follows even superficially the work being done today in economics, sociology and political science, Marxism is still very much a force to be reckoned with in those fields. Last year, for example, Joan Robinson, second only to Keynes himself among Keynesian economists, published her *Essay on Marxian Economics*, which is all the more impressive as a critical tribute because of her basic political disagreement. Marxism is far from dead, despite the obituaries constantly being printed—so constantly, in fact, as to attest to the liveliness of the corpse!¹

But something has obviously gone wrong with the Marxist scheme of things so far as progress towards socialism is concerned. Two passages will perhaps indicate what it is:

‘The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has grown up and flourished along with it, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. (*Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 836–7.)

‘III. *Proletarian revolution*—solution of the contradictions. The proletariat seizes the public power . . . Socialized production upon a pre-determined plan becomes henceforth possible. The development of production makes the existence of different classes of society thenceforth an anachronism. In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the State dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over nature, his own master—free. To accomplish this act of universal emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat.’ (Engels: *Socialism, Scientific & Utopian*, pp. 74–5.)

The first prophecy is being fulfilled. The incompatibility of

¹ There is an interesting split today between the economists and sociologists, who seem to be becoming more interested in Marxism, and the philosophical-literary intellectuals, who were originally attracted to Marxism for political reasons and who are now repudiating it for the same reasons. This is part of a broader split, in which the intellectuals, disillusioned by Stalinism and the decline of the Left, are turning from politics, while the economists and sociologists are growing more political.

private property forms with modern mass production has reached the point that everywhere private capitalism is dying, collective economics is advancing, planning is replacing the anarchy of the market, the bourgeoisie is being expropriated. The contradiction between the expansion of productive power and the restriction of the effective market has become so acute that the system simply cannot hold together without more and more intervention from the State. The present war, which is itself largely the result of this contradiction, has speeded up the collectivizing process in England and America, and in Germany has carried it so far as to produce a non-capitalist society.

The second prophecy, on the other hand, is far from fulfilment. For the expropriators of the bourgeoisie are not the working-class, but a new political bureaucracy. Hence we see collectivized—or 'statified'—economy coming about not only without that political democracy Marx expected to accompany it, but even with a lessening of the degree of democracy characteristic of capitalism. Far from the State dying out and man becoming free 'as anarchy in social production vanishes', the State is omnipotent and man enslaved in direct proportion to the degree of collectivization. The first successful working-class socialist revolution has degenerated into a totalitarian system whose control over the thoughts and actions of the people is more complete than anything known in history. And this system was erected by Stalin on the foundation of collectivized property laid by the 1917 revolution—not, as Trotsky, misled by the mechanical application of Marxism, expected it to be, on the *ruins* of collectivized property.

One cannot deny that this evolution was not anticipated by Marx and Engels, nor that it requires great changes in traditional Marxist thinking. We must, first of all, face the fact that the working-class has so far, despite some excellent opportunities, proven unable to take and hold power anywhere, and that the rise of Stalinism and Fascism is primarily due to this failure. From the degeneration of the 1917 revolution we must conclude that collectivism is a necessary condition for socialism but not a guarantee of it; that certain sacrifices of democracy made by the Bolsheviks in the early years of the revolution facilitated the transition to Stalinism; and that in general means must be related more closely to ends, and problems of democratic organization *within and between working-class groups* considered as seriously as

problems of class warfare and economic change. From the transition from bourgeois private capitalism to bureaucratic collectivism which is taking place *without socialist intervention* throughout the world, we must conclude that once capitalism has reached a certain stage of decay it will not automatically be succeeded by socialism, but that if the working-class is unable to resolve the crisis *its* way, the bourgeoisie will resolve it *its* way: through the milder forms of State intervention at first, through fascism ultimately and their own elimination as a ruling class.

In a word, we can no longer believe in the inevitability of socialism. This weakens Marxism propagandistically, but strengthens it scientifically. In collectivism there are possibilities of both desirable, from my viewpoint, and undesirable kinds of social systems. The mystique of inevitability can be removed from Marxism without injuring—quite the contrary, in fact—the basic insights of Marxism: that class struggle is the underlying pattern of history; that men act primarily from materialistic, ‘selfish’ interests; that the development of the forces of production sets certain limits and offers certain possibilities to political action.¹ Nor should we forget that the ‘point’ of Marxism, as developed by Marx at least, was not economic determinism but rather political activism, as expressed in his famous epigram: ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it’.

These are the conclusions I should draw from the course of history since the last war. They are very modest compared to those now being drawn by others, whose various political positions are based on the assumption, conscious or not, that democratic socialism is a dream, the working-class has shot its bolt, and the present social systems, on our side of the battle-lines at least, capable of indefinite survival. It is time to look at these positions.

¹ This is not inconsistent with the criticism above of Marxism for its failure to foresee the evolution of *totalitarian* collectivism, for this was an error in *judgment*, due to Marx’s habitual over-optimism and over-confidence in the working class—a defect one finds in all great revolutionaries. It was not a defect of Marx’s *system*, since the rise of collectivism can be explained best by the necessities of organizing modern mass production, and the totalitarian form it has so far taken can be explained best by Marx’s theories of class struggle and exploitation.

IV

There would seem to be only two historically real positions to take at this time. (By 'historically real' I mean (a) reflecting the actual development of society, and (b) having some chance of realizing the values those who hold them want to see realized.) One is that of those who quite frankly favour the new totalitarian values. The other is that of those who hold to the old democratic values, and look to revolutionary socialism to realize them.

Neither is held by any significant number of American intellectuals today. There are developing, instead, four fairly well-defined positions, 'common to all being a rejection of revolutionary socialism in favour of supporting (and compromising with) various elements in the *status quo*.

There are, first of all, those religious obscurantists who conclude that since there is a historical connection between the evils of the present and the traditional democratic values, therefore we must go back to pre-bourgeois values. They have already been dealt with at length in this series, so I shall only note that in some ways they are the most logical of all. For if revolutionary socialism is the only road forward for democratic values, then if this road is rejected, it is logical also to reject those values. Or, put slightly differently, if one gives up one's socialist beliefs, one can only take a *tragic* view of the world today. Thus it is the religious thinkers who now show, in a subjective sense, the *least* failure of nerve, since they (like the fascists) dare to recognize the actual state of affairs and draw drastic conclusions from it.

The remaining three schools all accept the basic democratic values, and hope to preserve them by various non-revolutionary means. The *Totalitarian Liberals* simply insist that the present trend towards bureaucratic collectivism is a *fulfilment* of progressive ideals (except, of course, in the Axis nations!). The *Conventional Liberals* are disturbed by existing anti-democratic tendencies, have a vaguely socialist faith, but put off any action in order to give 'lesser evil' support to the present war. The *Conservative Liberals* see most clearly of the three groups the unpalatable reality of existing trends, but reject socialism as itself totalitarian, and hope to salvage the basic democratic values by a 'balanced' or 'mixed' society.

The best examples of *Totalitarian Liberalism* are to be found in the speeches of Vice-President Wallace, with their 'people's

revolution' mystique, and in such journals as *P.M.* (for all its splendid muck-raking) which are aggressively critical of bourgeois reaction and aggressively uncritical of the Roosevelt Administration and Stalinist Russia. Underlying this position is a Victorian 'optimism of progress' which is a regression like the obscurantists' revival of Original Sin, except in the opposite direction. Social progress is seen as the automatic, inevitable consequence of industrialization and the spread of education, and as little sensitivity is shown towards the quality of the political means taken to those ends as certain Marxists show towards the quality of the means taken to bring about collectivism. The present war is seen in positive terms as a 'revolutionary' war, a 'People's War', etc. The openly reactionary turn the war has taken has greatly reduced its influence at the moment. Its chief significance in the future will probably be to corral sincere but naïve liberals into uncritical support of Stalin's post-war policies.

The *Conventional Liberal* position as applied to this war is essentially an extension of the old Popular Front idea: to support democratic capitalism against fascism on the theory that once the fascist threat has been beaten off, the masses can then resume their struggle towards socialism. The German Social Democracy gave the tactic its first large-scale test, before the term 'Popular Front' was coined, when they tried to stave off Hitler by supporting Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic. Later tests were equally unsuccessful. What always seems to happen is that this policy is able to defend capitalism against the workers, but not against the fascists. In crisis periods like Germany in 1930-33, Spain in the Civil War, France in 1935-36, the *status quo* never remains stable but is overthrown from the Right if the Left withholds its fire.

The mistake the Conventional Liberals make is to look at politics in static terms. History is always moving in one direction or the other, and in wartime this motion is accelerated. The reactionary evolution of the war will proceed with increasing speed, as it has been doing in the past year, unless it is checked or reversed by some counter-movement of the working class and their allies. This counter-movement cannot be stimulated by supporting the present war, as the experience of the British and American labour movements to date has shown. Furthermore, also since politics are dynamic and not static, the process of fighting

the war as conducted by Roosevelt and Churchill is weakening the forces that will fight, after the war, for a progressive social order. In fact, it seems likely that the Conventional Liberals, from Sidney Hook on the left to Bruce Bliven on the right, will find themselves confronted with such a threat of domestic reaction, even after Hitler has been safely eliminated, that they will continue to rally to the 'lesser evil'. There is really no discernible end to this allegedly temporary tactic. If before the war it was proper to support the lesser evil of bourgeois democracy against fascism in Spain and France, if during the war it is proper to support the lesser evil of Roosevelt-Churchill against Hitler, after the war it seems almost certain there will be further crises, if not also wars, in which a similar choice can be made. But the Conventional Liberals look neither forward nor backward, but keep their eye on the ball: Beat Hitler! This is just as well for their peace of mind.

Since what I am trying to get at in this article is the relationship of basic values to the historical situation today, it does not seem necessary to criticize the Conventional Liberal position more fully. For it is an opportunist, hand-to-mouth affair, taking for granted its basic values, which are those of reformism-cum-ultimate-socialism, and putting off any action on them until the Greek kalends. I don't think socialist ideals can be kept in a state of suspended animation 'for the duration', and I fear that when Hitler is finally defeated and the working-class movement gets its famous 'breathing spell', it may have quietly expired from holding its breath so long.

V

The most interesting of these positions is *Conservative Liberalism*, a complex reaction to the failure of both the bourgeois and the proletarian revolutions to realize their aims. It holds fast to progressive *values*: materialism, irreligion, scientific method, free development of the individual. But it inverts the *concepts* with which these values are logically and historically linked, seeing human nature as evil, history as either cyclical or without pattern, democracy as unattainable under any circumstances, class rule as inevitable, and man helpless to make any major improvement in society through conscious effort. The fascist rejects both progressive values and concepts; the Marxist accepts both; each approach

is consistent in itself and a guide for action. The Conservative Liberal, attempting to combine progressive values and reactionary concepts, runs into paralysing contradictions in both his theory and his programme. But in this time of disillusion on the Left, his negativistic doctrines are enjoying considerable vogue.

The founding fathers of Conservative Liberalism were Mosca, Michels and Pareto.¹ Their most important work was done in the decades just before the last, and their freedom from the optimistic illusions of their period allowed them to foresee the catastrophes in store for bourgeois and socialist democracy. Michels' analysis of the political organization of pre-war Social Democracy is the definitive work in a field more important today than ever. Mosca and Pareto both developed some interesting theories about class rule and ideology, though Marx anticipated their basic conceptions. But their approach seems to me to be an emotional reaction (springing from disillusionment) against the aspirations of democratic ideology rather than what it claims to be: an application, for the first time, of scientific method to the field of politics.

Because the Enlightenment had naïve faith in 'human nature', the 'Machiavellians'—to use Burnham's convenient term—react with the assertion that human nature is something eternally fixed, with narrow limitations that cannot under any circumstances be overcome. To Rousseau's mysticism of optimism, they counterpose a mysticism of pessimism. This is a secular version of Original Sin, without the logic the conception has in religious doctrine. As Ruth Benedict indicated in an earlier article in this series, modern anthropology provides evidence that 'human nature' is neither 'Good' in the Noble-Savage sense nor 'Bad' in the Original-Sin sense, but rather capable of almost anything depending on environmental influences. 'Human Nature' is thus a historical, not a psychological, phenomenon, and there can be no 'iron law of oligarchy' *in general* but only, if at all, for the specific period and place—Europe at the turn of the century—

¹ James Burnham deals with their theories in his new book, *The Machiavellians* (John Day, \$2.50) which is the kind of popular summary of ideas that reminds one of dehydrated food: the juice and flavour as well as the water have been extracted. It manages to be both pedantic and superficial, and the reader interested in these theories will find an equivalent amount of the original texts more instructive and much more entertaining.

Michels was studying. Granted that the Enlightenment's optimism about man's nature, in the light of Freudian psychology, appears excessive today, it surely does not advance matters to react to the other extreme and assert an equally abstract conception. And at least the Enlightenment grasped the root of the matter: that man is shaped by his institutions.

In their view of 'human nature', the Machiavellians betray a lack of that historical sense which is the greatest contribution of Marxism to the modern consciousness. In their eyes the history of the past is a kind of morality-play which exposes, in endless repetitive scenes, the viciousness and gullibility of mankind. They are not interested in the differences between one period and another, and the reason for these differences, but rather in establishing, by myriad examples, that the same mental and moral qualities have produced and eternally will produce the same results. This view seems to me a regression to the pre-Hegelian historical tradition. A passage from Engels' *Anti-Duhring* is to the point:

'This newer German philosophy culminated in the Hegelian system, in which for the first time—and this is its great merit—the whole natural, historical and spiritual world was presented as a process, that is, as in constant motion, change, transformation and development; and the attempt was made to show the internal interconnections in this motion and development. From this standpoint, the history of mankind no longer appeared as a confused whirl of senseless deeds of violence, all equally condemnable before the judgment seat of the now matured philosophic reason, and best forgotten as quickly as possible, but as the process of the development of humanity itself.' (p. 30.)

For all their amassing of data, Mosca and Pareto never get beyond the descriptive level. They are unable to explain why social relations differed in the past and what differences may be expected in the future. In their terms, indeed, it is not possible to see why there should be *any* change at all, since, in Pareto's words, 'The centuries roll by; human nature remains the same.' Lacking any theory of historical development, they deal in 'eternal truths', relative to every time and place and hence relative to no time and place—in the style of the Enlightenment, though with a reverse content.

The Machiavellians, doubtless in reaction against the emphasis put on ultimate ends by the progressive ideologists, confuse

scientific objectivity with a disinterest in values. 'The law that it is an essential characteristic of all human aggregates to constitute cliques and sub-classes', writes Michels, 'is like every other sociological law, beyond good and evil.' (*Political Parties*, p. viii.) Pareto endlessly assures the reader that his 'logico-experimental' method is also beyond good and evil, dismissing 'Right Reason, Highest Good, Justice, Welfare, etc.' as 'all names that designate nothing more than indistinct and incoherent sentiment'. But, as a critic of Pareto well puts it: 'Ends and means profoundly affect one another, and it is impossible to deal logically with means without clarification of the nature of the ends. Reason, too, is concerned with the relation of various ends to each other, with the possibility of their mutual consistency, or harmony, and in cases of conflict with the grounds of preference.'¹ Even where ends are illusory, the scientist must account for men's choosing them and must explain their effect on reality. Yet although Pareto exposes in voluminous detail the rationalizations men have created to give an air of logic to their irrational actions, he never develops any theory to explain the *reasons* for this behaviour, since that would mean attempting to relate means and ends. Marx and Freud both evolved theories, but Pareto ignores their work in this field entirely—Freud's name fails to appear in the 100-page index to his four volumes—and contents himself with monotonous 'debunking', a procedure only one level higher than naïve faith.

The Machiavellians make a similar false disjunction between theory and action. 'Everybody can argue all night about how to save society', writes Burnham in *The Machiavellians*, 'but only a few have told us any truths about society.' They revise Marx's epigram: 'The democratic ideologists have only tried to change the world; the point, however, is to interpret it'.

But under the surface, they too have their values, just like Marx, the chief difference being they are less conscious of their bias and so less able to allow for it, which lands them in some very queer places. Their very lack of interest in values is itself a value, reflecting the hypertrophy of technique and organization and the atrophy of human consciousness that marks class society today, especially in the totalitarian countries. Pareto writes of 'the conflict between knowing and doing', and continues: 'For purposes of knowing, logico-experimental science is the only

¹ Morris Ginsberg in *The Sociological Review*, July 1936.

thing of any value; for purpose of doing, it is of much greater importance to follow the lead of sentiments'. The political result of this obscurantist dichotomy appears when he goes on to propose 'a community divided into two parts, the one in which knowledge prevails ruling and directing the other in which sentiments prevail, so that, in the end, action is vigorous and wisely directed'. (*The Mind and Society*, p. 1241.) From this to Mosca's accepting a Senatorship from Mussolini and Pareto's enshrinement as the ideological father of fascism is not a long step.¹

It is odd that Mosca and Pareto should have ended up in the fascist camp, for they were personally old-fashioned liberals, whose preferences lay along the line of Mosca's balance-of-power society, in which 'juridical defence'—i.e. civil liberties—would be insured by seeing that no one group or party grew strong enough to have things all its own way. The Church, the army, the business interests, the politicians, the peasants, even the trade unions were to keep enough autonomy to be able to check each other; political was to be separated from economic power; etc. This conservative programme was the result of their disillusionment with radical democracy. They came to feel that any attempt at revolutionary social change would result in a *worse* state of affairs. Napoleon expressed this attitude very well when he wrote in 1812:

'All the misfortunes that our beautiful France has been experiencing have to be ascribed to "ideology", to that cloudy metaphysics which goes ingeniously seeking first causes and would ground legislation upon them instead of adapting laws to what we know of the human heart and to the lessons of history. Such errors could only lead to a régime by men of blood . . .'

Pareto quotes this passage with approval. Yet he might have taken warning from the fact it was Napoleon, the dictator, who preferred tradition to 'ideology' (i.e. revolution). The Machiavellians were very sensitive to any threat against the balance of society from the revolutionary Left, but they seem unaware that capitalism in their day was already unbalanced by the rising power of Big Business, and that 'Juridical Defense' was threatened from the Right as well as from the Left. The cutting edge of their criticism was consistently directed against the progressive

¹ 'When, in an audience with Mussolini, I mentioned Pareto, he interrupted with emphasis, "He was my teacher. A great man—a very great man".' (A. G. Keller, in *The Yale Review*, June 1935).

ideologies, and when fascism materialized, they saw it as a bulwark of Liberalism against proletarian dictatorship. One hardly knows whether to laugh or cry when one reads that just before his death Pareto wrote an article solemnly warning the Fascist authorities not to make the 'mistake' of interfering with free speech and academic freedom, and insisting that the Italian universities should continue to teach Marxism.

The failure of the 1917 Revolution has caused a contemporary revival of the Machiavellian doctrine—attractive anyway to the American turn of mind because of its pragmatic disdain for values and general theory in favour of 'results', 'hard facts'. Two schools may be defined: the indigenous petty-bourgeois tradition (John Chamberlain, Charles A. Beard, *Common Sense* magazine), and the ex-Marxists (Max Eastman, James Burnham, Lewis Corey). The failure of 1917 has disillusioned the latter about Socialism and reinforced the former in their ancient hostility. There are big individual differences between the various Conservative Liberals, and some of them no doubt would repudiate the Machiavellians as their ideological godfathers. But the theory analysed above fits better than any other the actual tendency of their ideas. Eastman's ideas about the incompatibility of Socialism and human nature are straight out of Mosca and Pareto. Corey's proposal of a 'mixed economy'—or a 'mixed-up economy', as a friend calls it—and Chamberlain's earlier concept of a 'Permanent N.E.P.' are based on Mosca's 'juridical defense' formula. The psychological background of these beliefs is also similar to that of the Machiavellians: disappointment with the results of progressive movements. 'The Moscow Trials', Chamberlain writes, 'clinched the case for me against complete State ownership of the means and materials of production.' Just as the Machiavellians fashion an ideology simply by reversing the concepts of 1789, the Conservative Liberals, equally lacking in historical sense, simply reverse 1917—collectivism is the root of all evil, and the victory of any one class is to be avoided. Their formula for avoiding Thermidor is simple: don't make a revolution. If the Bolsheviks trusted too mechanically in collectivism and proletarian dictatorship, the Conservative Liberals have an equally mechanical faith that all good things will flow from the reverse of those propositions. Of the two errors—not that I think one must choose either—the Bolsheviks' is much the more forgivable.

The logic of events has put our Conservative Liberals into the same awkward positions as the Machiavellians found themselves. One might expect a 'juridical defensist' to favour the strengthening of labour unions in America today, for example, as a counterweight to the tremendous power of monopoly capitalism. Yet we find Chamberlain prosecuting, in the pages of *Fortune*, a spirited 'open shop' campaign. The ambivalent attitude of Mosca and Pareto towards fascism is repeated in their epigone, Burnham, who expounded the totalitarian elements in their philosophy in *The Managerial Revolution*, and now, in *The Machiavellians*, puts forward the liberal elements, without any apparent suspicion of the head-on collision between the two. And always, whatever their vagaries, the Conservative Liberals are led by their doctrine to line up with the top dog, the big battalions. Their superficial pragmatism and their overmastering fear of revolutionary change alike lead them to bow to the dominant forces of the moment. Their system is essentially no more than an apology for the *status quo*.

The Conservative Liberals, past and present, fail to see that in a society as dynamic and unstable as modern capitalism the effect of a 'debunking' of progressive ideology without putting anything positive in its place is not to bring society into balance, but simply to throw it still more in the totalitarian direction in which it is evolving of its own momentum. The Conservative Liberals' dream of a stable society run by an intelligently moderate élite proves inadequate either to control or explain the shattering forces working under the surface. History fills their ideas with an alien content, and their intelligent élite become the demagogues and adventurers of fascism.

VI

Finally, to sum up the line of my argument, and to apply it to the historical situation we are in:

1. *The development of the forces of production is pushing the world in a collectivist direction.* Hence the bourgeois-democratic *status quo* is dynamic, and cannot successfully be maintained either as a Maginot Line against fascism (Conventional Liberals) or a stable, balanced society (Conservative Liberals). The direction in which the bourgeois-democratic *status quo* is evolving is towards the 'bureaucratic collectivism' of Germany and Russia, because this

is more favourable to the present ruling class than would be the alternative of a working-class Socialist collectivism. To attempt to defend the *status quo* is to (1) weaken the progressive forces which might bring about the Socialist alternative, and (2) be one's self drawn along in the evolution towards the totalitarian alternative.

2. *The bureaucratic-collectivist movement of present-day society is destroying the basic progressive values.* These are my own values, and also, I imagine, the values of most of those who will read this. There is nothing eternal about them; they are historical phenomena and will disappear, are in fact disappearing, as capitalism develops into collectivism without social revolution. Marxian Socialism offers the best chance of reconciling collectivism with progressive values.

3. *Bureaucratic collectivism may or may not develop into a new form of class rule as permanent as was that of the bourgeoisie.* It is too early to tell, and the alternative Socialist evolution is still possible. Up to now it has been no more than a series of *ad hoc* solutions to various crises: the 1929 depression in capitalist nations, the isolation of the Bolsheviki revolution in Russia, preparation for war in all cases. It is still opportunistic, 'unconscious' in an historical sense. Not until the present phase of armed struggle for the redivision of the globe has resulted in the assured dominance of one or more Powers, and has been followed by the successful readaptation of bureaucratic collectivism to peacetime conditions—not till then can we see it as the next great historical epoch. During the war period, which will probably extend long beyond the defeat of the Axis powers, there will be unexpected overturns, sharp breaks in ruling-class control; and the transition to peace may be expected also to have its deep economic and social crises.

4. *There will, therefore, be revolutionary opportunities for a long time.* They may or may not be successfully exploited. The organized working-class movement is today extremely weak. And anyone who has taken active part in the Trotskyist movement, as I have, knows how fossilized as to theory, sectarian as to action, and undemocratic as to organization the present Marxist revolutionary groups have become. We need new working-class organizations, new radical parties, a reshaping of Marxian doctrine—all three on a less exclusively working-class basis, with a broader sense of human fraternity and democratic rights. But the road ahead lies that way, not in a retreat to pre-Marxist

concepts and an attempt to compromise with a deteriorating *status quo*. Furthermore, those who insist on the hopelessness of the socialist cause must either show that some other class and programme is more likely to realize progressive values, or else abandon those values. My objection to the various Liberal positions is that they do neither.

5. *The issues go much deeper than the political level.* The whole culture-pattern of American society, for example, has been formed by the present ruling class, through its control of the press, the radio, the schools, the movies, the churches and other instruments of expression. This is why, although the ideological requirements of a war against Hitler call for humane and democratic values, our war leaders have done nothing to re-educate people along those lines. The increase of race prejudice during the very war allegedly against Nazi racialism is one indication of how deeply American society has been impregnated with reactionary prejudices, and the ominous direction these prejudices will take in any crisis situation *so long as no positive counterforce is exerted*. Only a philosophy of the underdog, the common man, that is willing to carry its logic to revolutionary extremes can shatter the monopoly of culture in the hands of the upper classes.

6. *The process of revolutionary struggle itself has a profound effect on 'human nature'.* It brings out virtues and intelligences in the masses which have been systematically repressed by respectable society. Who has not been impressed, and even amazed, at the heroism, the capacity for sacrifice, the energy and resourcefulness, the fraternity, the spontaneous co-operation manifested by the Russian masses in the early revolutionary years, the French workers in the great strikes of 1936, the Spanish people in the first two years of the Civil War, and our own rubber and automobile workers during the 1937 sit-down strikes?

There is a fine passage in *The German Ideology*: 'Both for the production on a mass scale of this Communist consciousness and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*. This revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.'

J. KESSEL

PHILIPPE GERBIER'S NOTEBOOK¹—II

AN ADVENTURE OF JEAN FRANÇOIS

THE part of the maquis where Jean François is working is quite close to a fairly large town, where he often goes for provisions communications and false papers. Too often, in my opinion, because he was arrested there by the French police as he got off the train.

Jean François has acquired a taste for hand-grenades from his war experience in 'Reconnaissance' and had three in his suitcase. As he and his two captors were making their way with the crowd of travellers through the station exit, Jean was able to get his suitcase open and dump the contents on the ground. In picking them up he managed to slip the grenades into his pockets. While he was being taken to the Commissariat he twice stooped down to do up his shoe-laces, and the grenades were left in the gutter. The police then became suspicious of his movements and hand-cuffed him.

'Take them off a moment and let him sign his deposition' said the Commissioner when Jean François was brought up to him. Hardly were the handcuffs off than the two arms of Jean François shot out and struck the officers on each side, who both fell inwards across him. He shook them off, pushed the Commissioner away and made for the door of the police station. A priest entered at this moment. 'Stop thief' yelled the two policemen who had taken up the pursuit again. The priest blocked the door. 'Gaullist, Gaullist', cried Jean François. The priest let him by and immediately barred the way for the two officers. They all rolled over on the doorstep, and while the policemen were extricating themselves from the priest's cassock, Jean François ran down one street, then another, then another, and found his way to liberty.

But for how long?

His jacket had been torn in the struggle. If he went to the home

¹The characters and details of the incidents described in this article are fictitious.