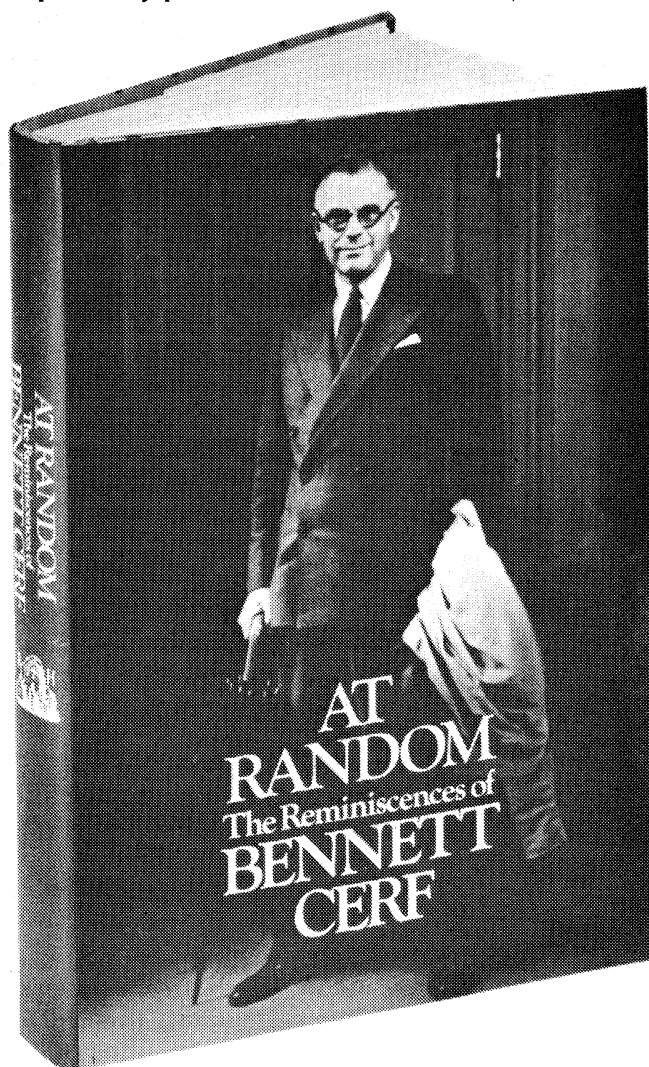


# AYN RAND AT RANDOM

**By Bennett Cerf**

From *AT RANDOM* by Bennett Cerf  
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**G**enerally, editors find a publishing firm with which they and their authors are comfortable, and stay with it for the rest of their working lives. Hiram Haydn was an exception. At the beginning of 1955 Hiram came to Random House as editor in chief. He had been at Crown Publishers before becoming the New York editor of Bobbs-Merrill, the Indianapolis firm, and I began hearing about his professional skill. I knew he was the editor of *The American Scholar*, the Phi Beta Kappa magazine, was teaching a writing course at the New School, and had under his wing a number of coming new writers, including William Styron. He had also written several books himself. When I heard that he was unhappy at Bobbs-Merrill, we got in touch with him and signed him up.

I admired Hiram—a wonderful fellow, although very exasperating in some ways. He had a great passion for first novels that other people thought were terrible. There was no way to convince him he was wrong, because he loved to help young writers—especially girls. The time he wasted with young women whose books were obviously destined to sell 918 copies! There was nothing we could do about it. He truly had us buffaloed!

Hiram had been with us for about four years when we negotiated a new employment contract with him—something unusual for use, but he insisted on having one. At about that time I went to Jamaica in February, 1959, with Moss and Kitty Hart for vacation. When I came back Donald told me that Hiram wanted us to tear up his contract. I said, “What are you talking about?” He said, “Pat Knopf has had a fight with his father, and Pat and Mike Bessie and Hiram want to start a new publishing house.” When Hiram came in to discuss the matter, he said, quite logically, “You can understand this, Bennett. It’s not that I’m leaving you to go to some other publisher, but that I want to go in for myself. You did it. You wanted to have your own firm.” We had no alternative, so we tore up the contract—reluctantly, because during the four years he was at Random House he brought us a number of authors we were very happy to have and who remained with us after he left.

## AYN RAND

The first of these was Ayn Rand, whose *The Fountainhead* had been published by Bobbs-Merrill while Hiram was there. I had never met Ayn Rand, but I had heard of her philosophy, which I found absolutely horrifying. *The Fountainhead* is an absorbing story, nonetheless. She was very dubious about coming to Random House, she told Hiram, because her sycophants had told her that we were way over on the left and that she didn’t belong with us. But this rather intrigued her—being published by a liberal house rather than one where she would ordinarily be expected to go. Furthermore, she had heard about me—one of the extra

dividends you get from being known. She had lunch with Hiram, Donald and me at the Ambassador Hotel, now unfortunately torn down, and asked us a lot of questions. I found myself liking her, though I had not expected to.

She had piercing eyes that seem to look right through you and a wonderful way of pinning you to the wall. You can't make any loose statements to Ayn Rand; she hops on you and says, "Let us examine your premises." I am likely to shoot off my mouth occasionally and make statements that I don't quite mean or can't quite prove, and Ayn, again and again, would nail me. We liked each other; that's the answer. She asked me an infinite number of questions. Later on, after she came to Random House, she showed me a chart she had kept. She had visited about fifteen publishers, and when she got home she rated them on all the things they had said. I didn't realize, of course, that I was being examined this way, but I came out very high because I had been absolutely honest with her. I had said, "I find your political philosophy abhorrent." Nobody else had dared tell her this. I said, "If we publish you, Miss Rand, nobody is going to try to censor you. You write anything you please, in fiction at least, and we'll publish it, whether or not we approve."

She was just finishing *Atlas Shrugged*, and by the time we published it, we had an enormous advance sale. It was her first novel since *The Fountainhead*, and we printed a hundred thousand copies, knowing there would be tremendous interest in it. Then the reviews came out. The critics were hostile, as they always were to Ayn Rand, and the sale was badly crimped for a while. We thought it was going to be a failure, but the fact of the matter is: the book has gone on and on and on, through many printings, even in spite of its availability in paperback. Incidentally, the reprint made history. *Atlas Shrugged* was very long, and there was no possibility Ayn would cut it. So for the first time its publisher, New American Library, dared to price a mass-market paperback above fifty cents—they priced it at ninety-five.

At any rate, Ayn and I became good friends. What I loved to do was trot her out for people who sneered at us for publishing her. She would invariably charm them. For instance, Clifton Fadiman, who had snorted at the idea of our publishing Ayn Rand, sat talking with her until about three in the morning. George Axelrod, author of *The Seven Year Itch*, toward the end of a long, long evening at Ayn's, disappeared with her into another room and we couldn't get him to go home. Later he said, "She knows me better after five hours than my analyst does after five years."

Ayn is a remarkable woman, but in my opinion, she was not helped by her sycophants. She's like a movie queen with her retinue, or a prizefight champion who's followed by a bunch of hangers-on, or a big crooner and his worshippers. They all come to need this adulation. These people tell her she's a genius and agree with everything she says, and she grows more and more opinionated as she goes along. You



Ayn Rand

Photo by Phyllis Cert Wagner

can't argue with Ayn Rand. She's so clever at it, she makes a fool out of you. Any time I start arguing with her, she'd trick me into making some crazy statement and then demolish me.

## ATLAS SHRUGGED

But for some reason or another, Ayn liked me. She told me that one of the characters she put into *Atlas Shrugged* near the end was inspired by me. She was determined to save me, as she called it, because I was a very nice person with a very good brain that I was wasting on all the worthless causes I believed in. She was trying to convert me to her way of thinking; she didn't have a prayer, of course, but I did like to hear her expound her cockeyed philosophy.

A very peculiar thing happened early in our relationship—the first time Phyllis met her, Ayn came to our house and said to Phyllis for openers, "We have met before." Phyllis said, "Oh, Miss Rand, you must be mistaken." Ayn Rand said, "We have met before." Phyllis said, "It's impossible. I certainly would remember if I had met you." Ayn said, "No. You wouldn't. Do you remember when you were a baby starlet at RKO in the movies?" Phyllis said, "Yes." Ayn said, "I was working in the costume department there at twenty-five dollars a week, and I handed you several of your cos-



tumes.” Incredible, but true.

Ayn’s a very simple and modest woman. We were on our way to lunch in Radio City once, and as we passed one of those junk shops with all kinds of statues and knick-knacks, she saw a little blue bracelet in the window, and like a twelve-year-old girl, Ayn said, “Isn’t that a beautiful bracelet!” So I went in and bought it for her. It cost exactly one dollar, but she was as happy as a child.

She’s so brilliant at expounding her theories! When she appeared on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson, he had planned to have her on for only a few moments, but he ended by throwing out the rest of the program and even asking her to come back. He said that the mail he got from that show was enormous. People react violently to her iconoclastic statements. She’s entirely against any religion. She thinks that strong, utterly selfish people should prevail, and that, in reality, two percent of the population is supporting the other ninety-eight percent. She says, “That’s all wrong. The two percent should really be the gods instead of being reviled by the people they are supporting. Charity and all of this public welfare is the bunk.” *Atlas Shrugged* is a story about capitalists who finally go on strike. They leave the industries to labor and say, “All right, you run them.” The natural result, according to Ayn, is that everything goes promptly to hell. There’s a lot in what she says.

Ayn believed that the critics were out to get her, and they really did tear her books apart. She wanted me to have reviewers fired or go to the *Times* and complain about them. I said, “I can’t. If they gave your book to another critic, you’d get the same kind of review, Ayn. Whether you like it or not, most people don’t agree with your ideas and it’s your ideas they’re attacking.”

Anyway, she began doing a series of articles for a magazine she and one of her disciples publish—*The Objectivist*. Ayn collected them to be done in book form, and I said we were happy to have a new book by her, but when somebody at Random House read the manuscript—which I certainly wasn’t going to do—and found that one of the essays likened John F. Kennedy to Hitler, saying that their speeches and objectives were basically the same, I read the piece and absolutely hit the roof. I called her and said we were not going to publish any book that claimed Hitler and Jack Kennedy were alike. Ayn charged in and reminded me that I had said when she came to us that we would publish anything she wrote. I reminded her that I had said fiction. I said, “You can say anything you want in a novel, but this something I didn’t foresee. All we ask is that you leave this one essay out.”

Ayn was enraged. But as I said, arguing with her was like running your head against a stone wall. I remember when *Atlas Shrugged* was being edited by Hiram Haydn. The hero, John Galt, makes a speech that lasts about thirty-eight pages. All that he says in it has been said over and over already in the book, but Hiram couldn’t get her to cut a word. I very angrily said to him, “You’re some editor. Send

her in to me. I’ll fix it in no time.” So when Ayn came in and sat down, looking at me with those piercing eyes, I said, “Ayn, nobody’s going to read that. You’ve said it all three or four times before, and it’s thirty-odd pages long. You’ve got to cut it.” She looked at me calmly and said, “Would you cut the Bible?” So I gave up.

At any rate, during our final meeting about the book of essays, she wouldn’t stop haranguing. I kept telling her, “Ayn, I’ve got to go home.” (It was about six o’clock and Phyllis and I were giving a dinner party that night.) As we left the building Ayn was still repeating that I had promised her I wouldn’t ever change her copy. I finally got into a taxicab, and she was still standing there on the sidewalk, talking. Finally she gave her ultimatum, “You’re going to print every word I’ve written—or I won’t let you publish the book.” I said, “That’s that. Get yourself another publisher.” I was adamant about it. Imagine putting our imprint on such a book! Well, some other publisher took it. I must say, I don’t think anybody ever read those essays. I never heard one word of criticism, and I never even saw a review of the book. When Kennedy was assassinated that fall, I wrote Ayn to ask if she didn’t agree now that she was wrong. She didn’t agree at all. She said the assassination had nothing to do with what she had to say. It didn’t change her opinion one iota.

I liked her and still do. I miss her. I thought she was one of the most interesting authors we’ve ever had. Many people who disapproved of a lot of the books we publish worshipped Ayn Rand; and wherever I go lecturing, somebody is sure to pop up and say, with adoration, “Tell me about Ayn Rand.” When she gave a talk at Harvard, the hall was full of students who came to hoot but stayed to applaud. They weren’t convinced by her but they were impressed by her sincerity. This is a brilliant woman.

## THE BAKKE CASE

*continued from page 23*

desirable to have such policies set for political reasons, by government officials.

Also compounding the issue is the fact that the University of California is an arm of the state and therefore required by the Fourteenth Amendment (as private universities should not be) to deal with people in a “racially neutral” manner, regardless of the social consequences.

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# A RIGHT-WING REUNION: The 1977 Convention of the Young Americans for Freedom

By Tom G. Palmer

**T**he 1977 national convention of the right-wing youth organization Young Americans for Freedom met recently in New York City, and in many ways it showed the direction the American right wing is taking in these days. YAF is not what it was ten years ago, yet it is still around, and occasionally manages to exert some influence on the political scene. There are presently far fewer YAFers than during the days of the Vietnam War, when thousands of students were signed up in campaigns against the violent excesses of the antiwar left, (even though their membership is up from 1975, due to the influx of new members and funds generated by the emotions of the Reagan campaign for the Republican Presidential nomination.) Now, YAF is down to the hard core; probably no more than 6,000 Americans belong to YAF—a large portion of these are non-active or adult associate members—and few states have active state organizations. Their major strength seems to lie mainly in the Northeast (particularly in New York), and in the South.

The pantheon of present YAF heroes prominently features Ronald Reagan, YAF founder and National Review editor William Buckley (though even he has strayed from the path in his endorsements of decriminalization of marijuana and the Panama Canal treaty), South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond (presently orchestrating much of the saber rattling over Panama), North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, and rabble-rousing rightist Robert K. Dornan, a rising star. The issues they like to talk about are the Panama Canal, Communist slavery, East-West trade, and “free enterprise” (to be distinguished from the “free market”). They represent a good deal of the mainstay of the American right—maintaining a dying tradition in league with the thousands of “little-old-ladies-in-tennis-shoes” who devotedly skimp on meals so they can send a part of their monthly social security check to (check one): stop the canal giveaway; fight the Reds and Pinks who are taking over the campuses; elect Ronald Reagan; alert the public to the menace of Communist invasion; stop America’s moral decline.

Approximately 450 delegates (and perhaps 150-200

other members) gathered at the Statler Hilton Hotel in New York City from August 24th to 28th to prepare resolutions, elect new officers, lay plans for the future, and party. They were sporting buttons with such slogans as “Amy Carter Sells Pink Lemonade,” “Register Commies—Not Guns,” “Don’t Ditch Our Canal,” and “Speak Softly and Build the B-1.” The turn-out was well in excess of their 1975 Chicago convention, where they were racked by internal dissension. At that convention, several state delegations were not seated and nine members of their twenty-five member national board boycotted, thus forfeiting their memberships. I went to New York with another libertarian to set up a table for the Young Libertarian Alliance, hoping to find some sparks of libertarian sentiment that might be fanned into flames. Little did I know how futile our efforts would be.

I had once, many years ago, been an active YAFer and was interested to see where they had gone and what they were like. My own YAF involvement began while a freshman in high school as chairman of the Edison-Fountain Valley High School chapter in Orange County, California. Up I climbed, to chairman of the Orange County YAF Council, vice-chairman of CAL-YAF, treasurer of USC YAF, Executive Director of CAL-YAF, chairman of a U.S. Senatorial youth campaign, and potential candidate for the national board of the nation’s largest (read only) explicitly conservative youth group. My political baptism in YAF taught me a great deal and, now that I have put a considerable distance between myself and the right, I look back on my experiences with a certain fondness. My years in the Young Americans for Freedom, before my switch to libertarianism, gave me numerous insights into the mind of the young conservative and what makes him tick.

We arrived with a busload of YAFers from Virginia Wednesday afternoon and proceeded to set up our table of pamphlets, books, banners, and the like. The next five days would certainly have to be counted among the most depressing and boring of my life. Not only were most of the YAFers uninterested in the free market, but I would not count the present crop among the intellectual cream of American stu-