

A program in the time of the count-down

Conservatism and Reality

REVILO P. OLIVER

POLITICS IS the art of the possible. Conservatives can forget that only to their own peril—indeed, in present circumstances, their own destruction.

It is true that the reality perceived by observation must be comprehended by theory, but the mind of man is forever tempted by imagination, the lovely sprite who can, with a swiftness that eludes the eye, leap over the gulf that separates the idea (*eidos*) from reality.

The greatest of all political theorists strove to state in unmistakable terms the precisely delimited scope of each of his political writings. In the *Republic*, he em-

phatically warns his readers that he is tracing a *politeia en ouranôî*, and repeatedly reminds them of the distance between sky and earth. The *Laws*, to be sure, are more "practical," but after a long prologue of deductions from existing constitutions and their historical antecedents, the problem to be treated theoretically (*logôî*) is explicitly defined: construct a constitution for a new city to be founded in a given place at a given time by a man who (for the purposes of the hypothesis) will be able to impose whatever institutions he deems best on inhabitants whom he will select from a given racial stock within a

stated range of social status and previous political experience. Like the architect's exercise in designing a house to be built with absolutely unlimited funds (solid gold floors, if you wish), the problem is highly instructive, but obviously remains in the realm of theory. Yet these treatises—and significantly the *Republic* far more than the *Laws*—have over and over again, in every age in which they were read, inspired a Plotinus to suppose that he can establish a Platonopolis, if only the all-powerful Emperor will issue the orders and put up the money.

Throughout most of its history in English, the word 'philosopher' has correctly implied a union of the highest speculative faculties with a ruefully wise acceptance of the imperfection of the universe and the fallibility of man. I do not deprecate metaphysical thought, of which I am the first to vindicate the necessity, but I do suggest that when conservatives undertake to formulate a political doctrine, they will do well to give priority to thought about problems within the very narrow range of what is now possible. As the author of the most penetrating analysis of our contemporary plight, Richard M. Weaver, puts it in *Ideas Have Consequences*: "We are looking for a place where a successful stand may be made for the *logos* against modern barbarism." The question is strategic, which is to say that it is eminently and urgently practical.

We need above all to know accurately the strength of the enemy and our own. And within our own ranks, agreement on strategy is far more important than unanimity in metaphysics. In recognizing this, we no more compromise whatever absolute truths we may know than we compromise the laws of gravity when we compute the path and velocity of a body that moves, not in an ideal vacuum, but in the atmosphere that, however regrettably, makes shape and

weight as important as the gravitational constant. And if we recognize this frankly, we may at least hope to mitigate the querulous anarchy of contemporary conservatives, whose often suicidal dissensions are less frequently the result of personal friction and rivalry than of a habit of bringing to every question from free trade to ethnic differences a set of beliefs so absolute that they absolve their holders of the tedious duty to ascertain and weigh facts.

The diversity of conservatives' principles is, indeed, the very first datum that we must consider. You and I (who are, of course, real conservatives) can easily assemble in any city thousands of persons who are conservatives in the sense that they are *on our side* against the motley horde, made up of Communist conspirators, Socialists, greedy proletarians, and superannuated children yelling for a warless world with free ice cream, which has promoted and imposed the continuous "New Deals" of the past three decades. But if you and I seek to convey that audience to our perfect orthodoxy, expounding candidly the full implications of our views on every subject from taxes to transubstantiation, we shall be operating a suburban train outward bound at five o'clock. Passengers will get off at every station in our argument, and we shall be lucky if we reach the end of the line with enough real conservatives to man two or three bridge tables.

Though the fact may be distressing to some of us, conservatives today are as hopelessly divided by divergent principles, discordant faiths, and conflicting interests as were the British colonists whose united efforts created the United States. If a conservative doctrine is to be formulated, it must be in terms of essentials on which a reasonable consensus is possible. And if it should be impossible intellectually to seek

such a consensus by a dispassionate and objective determination of what is essential, or emotionally impossible to attain a mutual forbearance as great as that of our forefathers in 1776, we may as well go home and leave our future to the arbitrament of Spengler's *Schicksalsmenschen* and Amaury de Riencourt's *Coming Caesars*.

If conservative thought is to be politically effective, it must rely on human experience, logic, and common sense; it needs Edmund Burkes and Irving Babbitts, not young Shelleys possessed by a Demon of the Absolute. A proposition, whatever its justification in faith or theory, is for political purposes excluded if it does not fall within the range of present possibility.

Perhaps the most seductive absolutism of our time on the conservative side is the illusively simple equation of politics to religion. It may have its origin in a personal and intuitive faith, or in theological demonstration, or in the consideration that history provides no example of an ethical system that could long survive divorce from supernatural sanctions, or in the observation that our political collapse is the result of a moral nihilism produced by contemporary scientism (in violation of the scientific method), scepticism (when accompanied by infinite credulity), relativism (when a cover for concealed absolutes), and pragmatism (with its conclusions pragmatically dissembled). From one or more of these perceptions it is easy to infer that the only correct—or the only feasible—political conservatism must be based on an affirmation of Christianity. This is, in fact, one of the propositions most generally accepted by conservatives; certainly, of all persons covered by the very wide and inclusive definition we suggested above, more than ninety per cent, including (*nota bene*) some agnostics and atheists, would give it unqualified assent.

But affirmation obviously implies something more than the ostentatious neutrality

of the modern state, which legally equates Christianity with voodoo, exhibiting a lofty and impartial disdain for both. The public schools, in particular, encourage and, in some instances, virtually enforce repudiation of Christian ethics and morality, and certainly undermine Christian faith by at least the tacit negation of excluding it from consideration in questions that are religious by Christian definition. Unless the public schools are either suppressed or very rigorously restricted to grammar, arithmetic, and other subjects without religious implication, they will be extremely powerful anti-religious forces until they affirm and inculcate the values of Christianity. And similar arguments apply in some degree to other organs of the state, which by their nature must either express or implicitly deny the Christian faith. It follows therefore, in this view, that American governments must be officially Christian and must actively promote the faith.

At this point, of course, it becomes necessary to say specifically what the governments are to promote. From its very origins, Christianity has required doctrinal definition. As every one knows, early Christianity included innumerable heretical sects that espoused everything from nudism to snake-worship, and today doctrine has in many quarters become so nebulous that members of the Communist conspiracy are spouting from their pulpits Communist propaganda only slightly flavored with a pseudo-religious vocabulary. Contemporary "modernists" can usually evade issues with amphigoric double-talk, but before schools, for example, can teach Christianity, they must know whether Christ was the Son of God or a young neurotic who managed to make some remarks of which a "modernist" bishop approves. An official Christianity must be a clearly defined body of doctrine, and if it is to be effective, an active faith in that doctrine must be imparted

to at least the controlling majority of our population. Therefore, in effect, the United States must have an Established Church, although it may be well to avoid that term. The conclusion is entirely natural; during the greater part of its history since Constantine, indeed, Christianity has regarded the state as obliged to suppress heresy, and the comparatively recent and milder concept of a state church established by various legal prerogatives is still accepted in both Protestant and Catholic countries of Europe. Our federal constitution does not forbid states to establish churches, and if a sufficient number establish the same church, a constitutional amendment permitting a national establishment would be a mere formality. So far as I know, there are three conceptions of what the "Established Church" must be, *viz.*, Catholicism, a selected group of Protestant churches, or a compromise by which the two would be regarded as formally equal. Here, of course, the proponents of an established church are most sharply divided.

Even if we ignore this division, however, by the time that we have reached this stage in the argument, our majority of over ninety per cent has dwindled to a comparatively small minority. The argument, however, is entirely logical, and those who follow it are to be commended for having avoided the slough of currently fashionable pseudo—religious nonsense which achieves a sickly semblance of toleration by urging that all cults unite in combating scepticism, because the important thing is to have "*a faith*," chosen from the contemporary flowerbed that provides nosegays to match any complexion. That, of course, is the equivalent of saying that it does not matter what you believe, provided you believe it hard enough—and is probably the most drastic and contemptuous repudiation of religion known to the modern world. Just as the antithesis of love

is not indifference but hate, so the opposite of a true religion is not doubt, but a false religion.

But the path that avoids the morass leads to some very solid conclusions, and one can only admire the hardihood and candor of the few who admit having followed it to its very end. For if true conservatism is identified with true faith, logic forces them to proceed—in some cases, I know, reluctantly—to the final conclusion that political conservatives who do not share their faith must be regarded either as tools to be used in opening the way to power or as "albatrosses hung about the neck of True Conservatism," who must be dumped into the sea before conservatism can become morally pure.

Now although I believe that this chain of reasoning contains errors (including an initial misunderstanding of Christian doctrine), I see no need either to argue its validity or to comment on the curious transformation of conservatism into a movement subversive of the American Constitution, and one to be forwarded by methods that at least smack of the conspiratorial. For political purposes, I think, it suffices to note that the end proposed is one that simply cannot be attained.

An obvious calculation should suffice to show that, whatever ought to be true, no existing church in the United States possesses the numerical strength, internal discipline, and intellectual and financial resources needed to found a *new* state in North America. And even if, *per impossibile*, a way were found to transcend the real and vital theological differences and the inveterate suspicions that divide Catholics from Protestants and separate from one another the Protestant churches that still take Christianity seriously, the aggregate of forces would remain insufficient to produce the desired transformation, except in the improbable event of

either (a) the miraculous conversion of the many people who can discern no evidence of intervention in the affairs of this world by a praeterhuman being, or (b) a national catastrophe involving such loss of life and material destruction as effectively to destroy social and political organization while leaving the territory free of occupation by non-Christian troops and leaving the organization of the church or churches concerned relatively intact.

In other circumstances, to be sure, the proponents of an established church, if sufficiently energetic and adroit, can exert some influence on our future by allying themselves with, and striving to deflect to their own ends, other forces in our political complex. But in such a manoeuvre they risk the error of the Victorian Englishmen who—incredible as it now seems—did imagine that Fabian Socialism was a means of restoring power to the landed aristocracy. In politics as in physics, the path of a moving body is determined by the sum of all the vectors of forces acting upon it. I strongly suspect that if the theocrats were to calculate the vectors of the various forces to which their own efforts could be added, they would discover that these efforts could promote only a fundamentally secular authoritarianism, and might do no more than contribute a few Christian terms to the vocabulary of an American Hitler. And it is possible that, with an irony endlessly repeated in history, their efforts might add precisely the moment of force needed for the triumph of the very antithesis of the terrestrial *civitas Dei* they have so carefully planned.

The argument that I have adumbrated above and tried to criticize objectively was chosen merely as a convenient and specific illustration of the facility with which, in political thought, *la logique mène aux abîmes*. It would be easy to multiply examples, including theories that most em-

phatically forbid the state to show the slightest religious inclination. My point is simply that our thinking must be Aristotelian and Thucydidean rather than Platonic.

In urging conservative political thinkers to turn from metaphysical formulations to the arduous task of measuring and understanding historically the forces now operating in American society, I do not pretend to predict what such an investigation would finally disclose (assuming that it can be made with sufficient objectivity to permit a reasonable consensus as to what is actually observed), and—obviously!—I can do no more than indicate by illustration the kind of question that we need to answer.

There does exist in American society a distinct force which is best termed centripetal to avoid the common mistake of identifying it with the ends which it is currently used to promote. Its origins are undoubtedly complex, ranging, perhaps, from a Pelagian concept of man to a residue of faith in tribal magic, but it is manifest in the apparently simple concept of a highly centralized and unlimited government as a means of legislating universal virtue. Politically this force is inevitably authoritarian, and in this sense R. Aron and A. Dandieu were right when, in their *Décadence de la Nation française* (1931), they described Fascism as a “*démonstration de l'esprit américain*,” basing that judgment on the Eighteenth Amendment and similar phenomena. Economically and socially, however, as the single example of Prohibition suffices to remind us, the centripetal force does not necessarily operate on behalf of objectives which are generally recognized as those of the Left.

It is true that in recent years the centripetal force has been used almost exclusively by the Left, and so effectively that it is now a valid generalization that every centralization or increase of governmental power on any political level automatically

advances the purposes of the Communist Conspiracy. But it is clear that centralized power, if somehow captured by anti-Communists, could be used against the conspiracy; it could be argued that only such power would be adequate to suppress the criminals; and there are some observers who are convinced that the centripetal force is *per se* irresistible. At all events, the force is one with which we must reckon.

If the centripetal tendency is ambivalent, there are two interrelated forces which the Left has consistently alienated and desperately fears. It will, I think, be generally conceded that under all the layers of sentimentality and frowsty sophistry with which our schools bedaub the minds of their victims there persists a latent but strong sentiment of American nationalism, which, as an awareness that the United States is at least potentially a great, powerful, and superior nation, may be distinguished from commitment to particular political forms. This is the sentiment that is offended and perhaps sharpened almost daily, *i.e.*, whenever the American government with morbid self-abasement cringes before a handful of rabble in a comic-opera country smaller than Baltimore that impudently demands our canal, or degrades itself to formal equality with the savage survivals of the Stone Age that are currently trooping into the "United Nations." This sentiment, I believe, is being intensified by present efforts to repress it, and will certainly persist as a force of very considerable magnitude until the territory of the United States is actually occupied by the armies of a "world government."

A second force is less obvious and may have escaped the notice of observers who protect themselves from contact with ordinary people, but unless I am much mistaken, there is to be discerned among a large mass of Americans, whose complacency conservatives so often deplore, a

yet generalized and inarticulate mood of frustration and resentment. The mass of which I speak is composed of persons who are not conservatives in the sense that they read conservative publications, have thought deeply about political principles, or have even examined the insane platitudes dispensed by our newspapers; they could be described as uninformed, but they are numerous and may even be a majority of the ill-defined group called the middle class. For years they have been bamboozled by do-gooders, hectored by sob-sisters and shysters, insulted by snobbish vulgarians, bled by tax-sucking parasites, and betrayed by traitors; it has seemed, indeed, that their patience or apathy was infinite. As a whole they are as yet only vaguely aware that something untoward has happened to them, but they have been disturbed—most of all, perhaps, by what may have been a fatal error in the strategy of the Left, which, for the first time in its entire campaign, has committed itself to an advanced position from which it cannot retreat without losing the war. The racial bigotry of "Liberal intellectuals," the racial agitation organized by the Communists, and the open pandering of political parties to racial blocs have produced a shock greater than the total effect of all the economic and international folly and fraud of our time. In other areas the resentment of which I have spoken is even less vocal and less definite, but slight manifestations of it may perhaps be seen in the regularity with which new issues of school-bonds, once a mere formality, are now defeated even in communities in which there is no organized opposition, and in the tedium and disgust with which many ordinary voters reacted to the recent presidential campaign. Though yet inchoate and unvoiced, the growing resentment of the "middle class" is potentially a force of great—and in some circumstances, explosive—power.

In all probability, the three forces that we have named will coalesce as a single force, possibly blind but irresistible, if the present inflation ends in a simple economic collapse; they will certainly so act, in the event of a war in which the United States is not decisively defeated or surrendered by treason within the first month of hostilities. And it is entirely possible that they could even now be set in motion by a concerted effort on the part of American conservatives. The point should be stressed, for conservatives, who are sometimes inclined to think of themselves as a helpless (as well as disorganized) minority, should realize that they are making a moral abstention—that they have the power to call up the whirlwind, if they choose.

But storms, apart from the morality of raising them and the violence with which they move, have distinct disadvantages. The forces thus released in American life would necessarily result in a high concentration of power in the hands of an individual who, whatever his intentions and however his power might be disguised under conventional formulae, would be in fact a *tyrannus*, and this concentration would automatically involve the sacrifice of part, if not all, of the economic and personal liberty that conservatives so highly prize. The very best that could be hoped for would be an Augustus, and while many of us would, perhaps, be willing to settle for that, we must remember that when the Romans accepted Augustus, they also accepted, unwittingly but predictably, Tiberius and Caligula. One should have no illusions about the inevitable declension of personal power—and of the society that has accepted it.

If conservatives are unwilling to resign themselves to a nationalist dictatorship as the only escape from the horrors of international Communism, they must find a

feasible alternative, and while there is a wide variety of theoretical models for which one could express a theoretical preference, I confess that I can see no available force or combination of forces of sufficient magnitude other than that represented by the American Constitution. A majority of the American people, despite the best efforts of our educators and publicists, retain a deep respect and an emotional attachment for the Constitution. It widely commands loyalty without a need for argument or persuasion; it is the natural focus of all patriotic sentiment, including the force that we called American nationalism; and it satisfies the misgivings of the “middle class,” whose resentments have been almost entirely occasioned by violations of its letter or spirit. Furthermore, whatever its shortcomings in comparison with *Ideae* laid up in Heaven, it undoubtedly is Western man’s supreme intellectual achievement in a design for government that was actually put into practice. And despite perversions of its letter and intent, the nation that adopted the Constitution did flourish to a degree unparalleled in history.

It seems to me, therefore, that the political doctrine of American conservatives must be based on the Constitution, and that accordingly our political thinking, if not frankly speculative exercise, must start from the premises of the Constitution. And we need most urgently to ascertain, so far as we can, whether the forces available to us can possibly countervail the forces that operate for our enemies, including the centripetal forces, which, it seems, we must leave in their hands.

We need also to understand the Constitution—particularly to understand clearly what is not expressed in the text. It is a curious fact that while many can recite the substance of the Constitution and are, of course, aware that it creates a federal government, very few know anything at all

about the thirteen state constitutions which were, of course, the necessary complement of the federal in forming the United States, and which provided the context within which the latter was written. R. G. Collingwood in his *Autobiography* remarks that we really do not understand a statement until we have formulated precisely the question that it was intended to answer, for a part of the meaning is contained in what the question excludes or takes for granted.

The authors of the Constitution, for example, thought it necessary to provide that no state should ever become a monarchy, but thought it unnecessary to stipulate that the "republican form of government" guaranteed to the states should never degenerate to a rule of the mob. They took it for granted that no state would ever be formed of Indians or have a population of Chinese. They took it for granted that the culture of the nation would always remain Christian and Humanistic, assuming that the classical tradition would be esteemed for its own sake, and that Buddhists and Moslems (who, by the way, are now our most rapidly growing sect) would be no more common than elephants. And it did not occur to them that the people of the states would ever permit property to be endangered by a mass of irresponsible voters.

We also need to understand clearly why the Constitution was, in a certain sense, a failure. Certainly, had its authors been able to foresee the bitter end of the third quarter-century of the Republic they founded—to say nothing of subsequent events—they would have either drastically revised the document or urgently called back the British troops. It is no disparagement of them to note that they were not omniscient; when Macaulay justly remarked (in 1857) that the Constitution was "all sail and no anchor," he was speaking of a ship whose rigging and trim had already been sadly altered by journeymen who understood

neither the original plan nor the consequences of their own acts. And the designers can scarcely be held responsible for the explosion of irrational fanaticism that a century ago wrenched the whole fabric with a shock from which future historians (if any there be) may say that it was never able to recover. We need now to understand the nature and limits of the repairs that can be made. And if patching up a battered fabric seems an inglorious task to more aspiring political thinkers, I wish them luck, but I remark that Antarctica does not seem a promising site for settlement.

Conservative thought, it seems to me, must first of all be realistic, understanding that politics, like the law, must be founded on regrets, not hopes. It deals with limited and refractory materials in limited ways to preserve as best it can the precious and perishable creation of the human spirit that we call culture. For just as we must leave the notion of the natural goodness of man to glandular optimists and other clowns, so we must recognize that civilization, far from being natural and spontaneous, is, like a bed of flowers or a field of corn, an artificial planting that man must maintain by unremitting work against the forces of an encompassing and hostile nature.

That distressing fact has long been indubitable. Educated men had no need to journey to Baalbek and Persepolis with the Comte de Volney to ask "*par quels mobiles s'élèvent et s'abaissent les empires*," and the contemporaries of Paul Valéry should not have had to learn from a world war that all civilizations are mortal—nor should they have lost their nerve at the discovery of what had been obvious to Herodotus.

The earth is strewn with the graves of civilizations. Nine great and dead cities lie heaped upon one another under the desolate mound of Troy. The very recent excavations on Bahrein Island have found,

buried upon one another, seven cities of an elaborate culture whose very name has been lost. A thousand Ozymandiases have left their shattered memorials on the lone and level sands, and a thousand poets have, with Firdousi, seen with melancholy wonder the owl stand sentinel on the watch-towers of Afrasiab. The disquieting thing is that these nations of the past perished from internal decay at least as often as from foreign conquest. The frantic edict of Suppiluliumas II, the last of the Hittite kings, shows us a demoralized empire in which treason was as rife and as covert as it is in Washington, D. C.

Occidental civilization, it is true, has shown itself more resistant than the great aggregates that Eric Voegelin calls the cosmological empires. A literature of the mind and spirit can survive the sack of cities, and a living tradition runs unbroken from Homer to our own day. But no one needs to be reminded how precarious has been that survival; how often the vital thread was all but snapped off; how brief in our three thousand years were the ages of greatness; how quickly the glory of the creative spirit passed from Athens and Rome.

The West has always been a comparatively small clearing in the wilderness. At every hour of its history the barbarian world, vast, prolific, brutish, patient, and eternal, has encompassed the area of civilization, and has scarcely been disturbed by the outposts of the most far-flung empires. The nomads of the desert grinned derisively and waited while the Macedonian phalanx, the Roman legions, and the British regiments marched over the ruins of Nineveh and into the past.

Far more painful to contemplate is the barbarism inherent in the West itself. It was the fellow citizens of Sophocles and Socrates who voted to massacre the inhabitants of Mitylene. In the Thirty Years War the armies of the most enlightened

nations of Europe marched back and forth, creating and recreating wastelands for the glory of God. And the "splendid strategy" of the British government that bombed the civilian populations of defenseless German cities to force the German government to bomb the civilian populations of defenseless British cities so that enough Englishmen would be killed to rouse enthusiasm for the war against Germany—that "strategy" might have brought a moment of nausea to even Attila or Hulagu.

Yet more painful is the knowledge that the savage is always present in our choicest assemblies, and that there is no way to keep him out: high lineage, social standing, democratic selection, education are all tests that we invoke in vain. The patrician Catiline nourished his diseased soul with dreams of blood and burning cities; and the elegant Fulvia thrust her bodkin through Cicero's tongue. Thaddeus Stevens sat in an American senate, and there were men who willingly touched his hand. And in the academic processions of Harvard, clad in the regalia of scholarship, march *Doctores philosophiae* whose spiritual home is a wizard's hut on the banks of the Zambezi or the blood-spattered tents of Genghis Khan.

The simple fact is that barbarism is the natural state of man. Men anatomically modern have existed on this planet for at least 50,000 years, but the first sporadic traces of rudimentary civilization appeared less than 6,000 years ago. And within every culture there always live great masses of people who know it only as an outward routine. The highways and subways of our great cities nightly bear homeward millions who no more understand the civilization in which they live than does the trained seal in his pool at the zoo. What is remarkable is not that civilizations have disintegrated, but that they came into being at all.

In his mature years Renan reduced

human culture to a grim formula: "*A force de chimères, on avait réussi à obtenir du bon gorille un effort moral surprenant.*" The formula, to be sure, leaves unexplained how the good gorilla is capable of moral effort under any stimulus, and whence came the transcendent perception of the good and the beautiful that inspired any men, however few, to create a culture of the spirit. But as a reminder of the precariousness of all civilization, the statement is unexceptionable.

On us, who would take thought to conserve the civilization of the West and the nation that, fulfilling a prophecy that seemed fantastic fifty years ago, is now the last great power of that civilization, devolves a task of painful delicacy and appalling magnitude. But the duty is one that no one of us can evade, for there are no longer ivory towers to which scholars may escape as Marie Antoinette escaped from politics to the simple life of the Petit Trianon. That very fact is a measure of the terribly rapid declension of our civilization. There is no cultivated man today who does not look back, as to a lost Paradise, to the beautifully stable world of 1910, and who would not gladly settle for 1926 or even 1932—and there is a very good chance that a few years hence 1960 will have charms that have not yet been disclosed by contrast.

The historical process is governed by laws which should not be beyond the powers of human observation and reason. It is possible, of course, that the West is irredeemably senescent—that through some biological deterioration of our racial plasma, or through the biological principle to which Spengler and Raven submit the incorporeal concepts which constitute a culture, history moves in a preordained cycle: *nascentes morimur*. But if we reject this quasi-astrological fatalism, there remain

historical laws of the kind with which the Occidental mind is peculiarly equipped to deal—laws of the kind studied by Correa Moylan Walsh in three volumes that are almost unknown even to devotees of "historionomy," largely, I believe, because their author was an American. Probably all the phenomena so brilliantly analyzed by Spengler and his imitators can also be explained by laws of cause and effect set in motion by human decisions. Such laws do not lead to fatalism any more than does the law which inexorably decrees that men who leap from roofs must suffer predictable consequences. And if history is governed by laws of this kind, conservative thought may not be powerless to conserve our heritage.

It is in such terms, I believe, that we, as rational men, must strive to outwit the forces of nature—to preserve (and perhaps, in some happier future, enlarge) our clearing in the wilderness. It is the task of conservative political thought, as I see it, to understand and measure all of the dismaying forces that threaten our survival, from the Communist Conspiracy that is today gnawing away another root of American life to the somewhat less immediate menace of the prolific barbarians in other continents. Its task is to devise strategy and to formulate, on the only available basis, the principles of our Constitution, a realistic and rational patriotism. Its task—if I may be permitted a naughty word that will chill tender minds raised in our "Liberal" hothouses—is to formulate a coherent and specific Americanism.

St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* is indeed an imposing monument of Christian metaphysics, and it may even have consoled some of its readers for the sack of Rome by Alaric. It doubtless also consoled its author, who died while the Vandals were battering down the walls of Hippo Regius. Our task is to defend Rome.

How genius and political prescription do not mix

Theater Workshop: "A British Peoples' Theater"

KENNETH PAUL SHOREY

"IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF moral nihilism," observes Pitirim Sorokin, "obscene plays can sometimes be produced with great effect, as a means of discrediting and undermining traditional values. They are a societal and cultural poison masquerading as entertainment."¹

In 1934, Joan Littlewood was stage manager of the Rusholm Repertory Theater in Manchester. There, she came into contact with Walter Greenwood, author of *Love On The Dole*, and Ernst Toller, the ultra-left expressionist poet and dramatist who later hanged himself in a New York hotel room. It is not known to what extent Toller's misplaced idealism infected Miss Littlewood at the time, although she was present

throughout the rehearsals for the only English production ever given to his play *Draw The Fires*. Married to Ewan MacColl (né Jimmy Miller), Miss Littlewood became the co-founder of Theater Union on an amateur basis—a company that continued to operate until 1939. During the war, she drifted into hack writing for the B.B.C. until certain officials concluded that she must be a Communist, and subsequently permitted her to seek employment else-