

The Double Standard

AS ELISEO VIVAS in this issue of MODERN AGE tells us, every political and ideological movement needs its demons to account for the gaps in its ranks, as well as its failures. But neither Freud nor Darwin nor Marx ever made black magic on the minds of conservatives that compares with what the mere existence of the Right, whenever possible the extreme Right, does to the thinking of those who are called liberals. The tragic day of November 22, 1963, was an enormous apperception test conducted on a national scale, projected on television screens, reported in newspaper and magazine columns, with the themes of the commentators echoed and reechoed for the comfort of those who needed to believe them. "We are all guilty" was one of them; "the cult of hatred that lay behind the act"

was another; and implicit or loud and clear in the explanations of the crime were the figures of the unreconstructed South and of the unreconstructed political opponents of the all-pervading liberal doctrine. An editorial writer in the *Nation* declared:

Throughout the South, of recent years, there has been a steady build-up of violence, with more and more incidents, each a bit ghastlier than the ones before. Girls in a Birmingham Church are blown to fragments. A sniper kills a Negro from ambush. Mob violence disgraces a university campus. Acts of violence receive implicit sanction and approval by elected officials. Defiance of law and order is incited, through precept and example, by these same officials. And so it has gone. All of which

suggests that it is not alone a mood of national "repentance" that is needed so much as it is a closer look at the "big picture" of war and preparation for war, of the steady preachment of violence in one form or another and the eclipse of social idealism. . . . (The *Nation*, December 14, 1963)

One writer in the *New York Times* called Oswald "politically eccentric," another recorded that the assassin to be sure had been identified by the Dallas police captain as "an adherent of the left-wing 'Fair Play for Cuba Committee,'" but added "there are also reports that Oswald, apparently politically erratic, had once tried to join anti-Castro forces." An editorial in the same paper on November 23 told of President Kennedy's efforts to curb violence in the United States: "And from the beginning to the end of his Administration, he was trying to damp down the violence of the extremists of the right." The *New York Times* editorial of November 25 stated: "None of us can escape a share of the fault for the spiral of unreason and violence that has now found expression in the death by gunfire of our martyred President and the man being held for trial as his killer." A contributor to a review designed to give the American reader some straight criticism in the place of the neighings and stompings of the tame stable mates of the standard book sections wrote:

It has been hard, these last two weeks, to feel much pride in being an American. Two assassinations, each ghastly in its own right and each uncovering still another side of our social pathology; callousness, maybe planned negligence on the part of the Dallas police; fourth grade children in the South cheering the news that a "nigger loving" president had been murdered.

The author then goes on to sketch Oswald's type:

A semi-intellectual, he picks up phrases and bits of ideology. . . . In one guise he is a man of "the left" and in another of the "right". . . . He is not a Communist, for that requires patience and discipline, nor is he a Marxist for that requires theoretical reflections . . . he finds his true moral home not with Khrushchev or Mao, who have begun to seem bureaucratic and settled, but with a hoked up vision of Castroism he has gotten from beguiled journalists. . . . But he is also a Southerner, a poor Southern boy burning with memories of class humiliation. The South because of its racist mania, is a violent society. . . . Lashed together by the delusion of superiority, the whites know violence to be a potent answer to threats from the dark. (Irving Howe, in *The New York Review of Books*, December 26, 1963)

But behind all this rhetoric what were the facts so far as anyone knew them? The crime was not committed by an anti-Negro Southerner, or by a man who wanted to build up American armaments, or in any guise at all by a man of the Right. The evidence those reporters and editorialists had before them showed that Oswald called himself a Marxist, he had wanted to become a citizen of the Soviet Union, he had propagandized for Castro and according to his widow had tried to kill General Walker, who has never been noted for his leftist sympathies. Oswald was a psychopath, but of the left-wing branch of that order, and the talk linking him to right-wing Southern violence was a wish and fantasy. The ambushings and bombthrowings in the South are mainly done by other mentally disturbed people as are those committed in Chicago where Oswald's assassin came from. Obviously many of these writers and commentators were bound to make the perpetrator into a man of the Right. An article late in January in the *Nation* advanced the hypothesis that he was in the

pay of the FBI. He must be anything, a stoopigeon, politically erratic or eccentric, anything but what he said he was—a leftist. The ideology the liberals created for him confirmed their tics and the existence of the demons who keep them always a step away from their private utopias. Oswald was no member of any states' rights cult of hatred and violence: a pro-Castro Marxist might be assumed to be motivated by precisely the contrary fixed ideas as those of his opposite numbers who bomb or ambush Negroes. So OK, if he didn't act as a trigger man for a rightist conspiracy, he's a stoop pigeon for the FBI.

Collective guilt is an illusory charge against a people, another way of turning the event into an indictment of the whole United States. Did the Russian people kill the Czar, murder the thousands of Kulaks, and those other thousands who died in the purges? Did they kill Trotsky with a pick-axe? These deeds however were official acts, acts committed on behalf of a regime that held the entire population by the throat. And what did some all-out professional liberals at the time have to say of that regime? I quote again:

. . . in 1937 when the John Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Soviet charges against Trotsky was being organized, a considerable number of prominent American intellectuals published a manifesto warning "all men of good will" against assisting the Commission and declaring that critics of the Moscow Trials were slandering the Soviet Union and "dealing a blow to the forces of progress." The manifesto was signed by Theodore Dreiser, Granville Hicks, Corliss Lamont, Max Lerner, Anna Louise Strong, Paul Sweezy and many other writers, artists and professors. (Philip Rahv, in *The New York Review of Books*, January 23, 1963)

It is this phenomenon that is the core of

the problem. What the liberals of 1963 were doing when they repeated the charges that the world Communist press was making that the assassination of the President, despite the facts before them, was somehow owing to the Right was the product of a, by now, automatic reflex. Not many of them are likely to have taken their text from *Political Affairs*, which calls itself "Theoretical Organ of the Communist Party, U.S.A.," which said in its December, 1963 issue:

It [this crime] is the ultimate depravity of the pro-fascist ultra-Right forces—of the fiendish Dixiecrats and racists—who will stop at nothing to destroy the democratic institutions of the country, to threaten the peace of the world. . .

It is the logical consequence of the repeated lynchings, bombings, and murders of Negro men, women and children in the Deep South at the hands of the Klan, the White Citizens Councils the National States Rights Party, and of the organized Nazi and fascist hoodlums.

The Left for a large and much published number of intellectuals has never been guilty, not of the purges, or the murder of Trotsky or any of the unpleasant events denied in the official line. Only after Stalin was denounced by his successor for some of these acts was it possible in these circles to admit 'the foes of the forces of Progress' were not slandering the Soviet Union when they said Stalin had been responsible for some pretty ghastly political murders.

But of course it is not just to identify the professional liberals with the far Left. They are not the same—they merely in this apperception test say the same things. They say them because they share the same demonology. In 1932 in Germany the chief demons for the Communists were not the Nazis but the Social Democrats. The line changed as the Soviet Union made its pact

with Hitler and then won the war he had unleashed against it. The post-war enemies were the so-called imperialist powers, that is, those who wanted to stop Soviet expansion or, in the propaganda phrases, "the war mongers," "the lovers of violence." These lovers of violence for the liberals when the chips are down are the rightists, perhaps in certain untidy instances the Chinese Communists or conceivably the Castroites, but never Khrushchev, who promised to bury us. And nothing changes this persistent, cherished image of the Soviet Union nor its power to make its docile friends in the West echo its own interpretations. For not only are the demons the same for the Communist and liberal intellectuals; their heaven is the same. It is a place where the economic order is such that everyone has enough food and a job and the world has peace. The future is mastered by planning and by technology, competitive forces are mastered by the bureaucracy, an affluent society rejects its foolish individual choices and gratefully accepts the serious objects decreed in their place. Reactionaries stand in the way of progress towards these goals. They cling to tradition; backward agricultural areas are tradition-minded and status-ridden. When a deranged killer who appears to be the same man who shot at one of the most conspicuous segregationists in the South assassinates the President of the United States, the liberal commentators can no more accept the evidence before them than they can when they deal with economics. Their tropisms are by now ineradicable. Let us listen for a moment to Walter Lippmann writing in the *New York Herald Tribune* of November 26: "In his alienation Oswald turned to the Left. But that was incidental. Those who spat on Mr. Johnson and on Mr. Stevenson had turned to the Right. The common characteristic of all of them was their alienation, the loss of

their ties, the rupture of the community."

Thus the Right gets into the act of murder committed by a self-avowed Marxist. In one sense, however, Mr. Lippmann is right, even if he is not far right. The extremes of Right and Left do indeed touch at the lunatic fringe—the most virulent of Nazi judges, the President of the Peoples' Court who with shrieks of fury sentenced the men of the July 20 plot against Hitler to death was a former Communist. The Eastern and Middle European countries now in the Soviet orbit have their former Nazi or Iron Guard or as they said "fascist" officials well represented in the successor Communist courts and administration. They have all, whichever side they were on, long been alienated from the Western tradition that has to do with, among other things, the search for truth.

Right and Left are measured with two different yardsticks by American liberals. Alger Hiss was invited some years back to talk to a group of students at Princeton University. A man of the Left, convicted of perjury, Hiss apparently supplied some form of nourishment otherwise lacking in the undergraduate diet. Gus Hall not long ago spoke to the students at Yale. Well and good, he is a leader of the Communist Party and may properly be heard on political questions by those who wish to listen. Other students at Yale, however, wanted to invite Governor Wallace to talk to them, and this the university administration pointed out to them would be "offensive and unwise"—Governor Wallace would have spoken after the tragic bombing of the church in Birmingham. Nothing linked the Governor to the bombing. It may well have been committed by criminal Southern segregationists but surely the Governor of the State, who is a segregationist but not a criminal, may properly be heard in his cause, as properly as Gus Hall, whose party has been responsible for the murder

of vast numbers of innocent people. Mr. Hall himself is undoubtedly free of any complicity in these murders, but the same thing may be said of Governor Wallace.

The samples could be endlessly multiplied. If the end can be expressed in vaguely humanitarian terms anything is justified. The liberals who denounce the cult of violence throw at us the propaganda picture of: "fourth grade children cheering the death of a 'nigger loving' president." Others among them not only defended the Soviet Union when its slave labor camps numbered ten or fifteen millions by saying the figures were invented, but also after the facts were well established and a new regime came to power openly acknowledging the very practices American liberals had so long denied, they cited the revelations as proof that Russia was evolving toward a new humanitarianism. The liberals now fitted Khrushchev as they had Stalin into their own image. When he said he intended

to bury us he was merely enjoying a little joke while actually on his way to providing more substantial satisfactions for the good life in the Soviet Union. When he takes up the cause of Cuba or Panama against the United States, or his jet fighters shoot down an unarmed American plane, this has far less importance than his clear perception of the malefactions of the demons of the Right.

It is true too much bitterness enters what should be debates among civilized intellectuals on the issues that divide them. Mr. Johnson's "Let us reason together" has been often quoted in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination. To reason together means, if it is to work, to listen, to weigh, to take account of the evidence. It means among other things the simple capacity to call a confused Marxist and a psychopath and a Castroite by those names without invoking the enemy one would have liked to have committed the crime. It means soul-searching, which is not the same as brain-washing.

—E.D.

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On the Conservative Demonology

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THE FIRST PART of this paper consists of an introduction, somewhat longer than is customary for a paper of this length, in which I discuss the role devils play and must play in the conservative movement. It is followed by an examination of two major devils in the demonology, Marx and Freud. I have appointed myself anti-devil's or God's advocate, so to speak, in order to show that neither the economist nor the psychologist is as demonic as the demonology would have it. If they are not, or rather, since they are

not, we can only dismiss them at our loss.

Had space permitted, I would also have undertaken to show that the doctrines of relativism and positivism, which are rightly considered to be two of the most dangerous doctrinal threats to conservatism, contain indispensable truths.

I start with a remark on which I expect universal agreement. Political life is a life of struggle: it is a struggle of wills, of passions, of interests, as well as of reason; but when reason is used in