

REVIEW AND COMMENT

American Spectator—A Nazi Sheet

TO UNDERSTAND The American Spectator it is necessary to glance briefly at the sources from which it came.

Nearly eleven years ago the green cover of the American Mercury began to shed its chlorine shade on the stands. The industry of setting up exaggerated straw men, and knocking them down with excessive bluster was on its way as a substitute for any kind of thought in American upper circles. It must be said that Mencken was as ingenious as he was indefatigable. The invention of the "booboisie" was only one of his triumphs, and that required long and arduous hammering. Once the trick was discovered, the grotesque bladder inflated, the vaudeville of exploding it could be repeated month after month. Sinclair Lewis brought on his Babbitt to join the cast of the circus. Up and down the country, Mencken sent his scouts, usually newspaper men whom it was useful to keep occupied exposing anything else but themselves and their own industry, to dig up more outlandish antics of the Mencken-and-Lewis robot. But no Babbitt above a certain rank was thus lampooned and mimicked. It was given out that the paper represented a "better class," a "civilized minority"—urban *parvenus* of any profession or racket, who had learned to distinguish between two French wines. The cackle of George Jean Nathan was heard offside in catalogues and purple passages, eternally annotating the credo. Mencken satisfied himself with the blunt qualification that he wrote for "men of honor." But when he ranted about men without honor, it was usually to castigate small fry—poets who had failed to enclose postage stamps, or the like. He took on no stronger adversaries than clubwomen and fundamentalists. The line of attack had a definite class basis. It victimized the lower middle class for its conditioned inferiorities, but in doing so the method was to identify the lower middle class with the "mere clod"—that is to say, with the worker, who was not worthy of mention, beyond his use as a measure of scorn.

The circus often grew stale and languished. Mencken would offer his body, with copious press notices, as a target for the purity leagues, or assault the unequal antagonists of prohibition, or take a fall out of the gods to liven it up. In time, some of the original favorites had to be dropped—Cabell, Ernest Boyd, even Nathan—unable to survive the test of sustained performance; and new writers were discovered to contribute piffling "exposures," local legends, inside newspaper tattle—most of which, judging by the one or two cases in which you happened to know the facts,

were false. The future historian will find little of sound criticism, penetrating analysis, or dependable social history in the whole long melange of the Mercury, devoted exclusively though it was to the "American scene." The show as conducted by Mencken and his changing galaxy of stars was bankrupt long before Mencken himself stepped out. Had he continued as editor, the magazine, with its philosophy and tradition, could only have become one of Propaganda Minister Goebbels' chief foreign organs.

But with the passing out of Mencken, the American Mercury gave birth to a child, the American Spectator. At any rate, it was edited by the favorite chore boys of the Old Master—Boyd, Nathan, O'Neill, Cabell. With its antique type-faces and newspaper format, it made a stir of gnats in the literary air. The announcement ran that the publication was "circulated simultaneously in England, France, Germany, Austria and Italy" (but not in Moscow), and was "on sale on all the first-class trans-Atlantic steamships," and "on file in all American Embassies in Europe and elsewhere." Dreiser's name appeared for a time, but he soon withdrew from that galley.

Cabell began to emit pale narcissistic gleams from his shallow waters. O'Neill analyzed his own plays and discussed his own style. Ernest Boyd had once blown up the balloon of "Aesthete, 1924" (in the first number of the Mercury), and snapped the bubble of his own making with a lighted cigarette. This is entertainingly related by Malcolm Cowley in "Exile." But most of the "aesthetes" stigmatized by Mr. Boyd have gone left, in the interim, and gained intellectual clarity, while he is deploring their loyalty to "antiquated" Marx, and writing about literary teas or the "lost art" of adultery. In a recent article Boyd patronizes the vigorous talent of the Soviet writer, Ilya Ehrenbourg, but he does not forget to offer pompous rebuke to what he calls "the doctrinaire querulousness of his American comrades." It is the old technique of tolerating abroad what you safely revile at home. Nathan's hand was principally felt in the editing, in the choicely sprinkled wisecracks, the diction of the rewritten articles; but from time to time he turned aside to beat the dead donkey of the theatre, or attack the horrendous pansy peril. A new school of police gazette writers, notably the author of *The Barbary Coast*, was developed to feed the Spectator, ephemeral as the old feeders of the Mercury. A sample of the unsigned editorial is the following:

"Education was never intended for mass

consumption . . . The educated man is now an interloper whose domination has been ruined by the simple process of multiplying his number until his class has been multiplied out of existence." This in February, 1933, anticipated one of the leading policies of Hitler: Confine education to the few.

In its two years' existence the American Spectator has published one moving and noteworthy piece: a narrative called "Sixteen Years," by Tom Mooney! One wonders how it got there.

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So far the effect was only another mild titillation for the idle. In the editorial sanctum the sacredness of individual opinion was preserved; a certain "liberal" confusion and dissent was the approved note; all that had been demonstrated was that the "aesthetes of 1934" assuredly were not the young men, but the old and sterile.

But with recent numbers the Spectator has taken an unmistakable position on the rotten Right. It has adopted an openly Fascist stand, expressed up to date in two policies: Split the growing solidarity between the American Negroes and whites for Negro emancipation, and: Defend Nazi Germany. The first task was begun in the August issue. The Negro bourbon reactionary, George S. Schuyler, was hired to write a vicious attack on the Scottsboro boys, Angelo Herndon, Samuel Leibowitz, and the whole militant working class defense built up around the victims of lynch-courts in the South. Herndon and others brilliantly answered the attack of this Negro lackey of the white ruling class. Replying to a similar article by Schuyler in the Pittsburgh Courier, of which he is a columnist, Herndon, young Negro Dimitroff of Georgia, wired:

"In your Pittsburgh Courier column of August 25, you say, 'Herndon is out on bail and will probably skip it like all the rest.' Just as you repeatedly knifed the Scottsboro boys by sneering at the mass fight for their freedom, so you attempt to knife me also . . . After thousands of workers and sympathizers have worked, sacrificed, and actually suffered to get together \$15,000 demanded by the Georgia lynchers for my bail, you stab me in the back . . . No doubt your attack on me will win the approbation of the lynch press of Georgia, just as your attack on the Scottsboro boys has already won the approbation of the Alabama lynch press. I shall not skip the bail the workers have collected for me . . . I shall return to Georgia ready to continue the fight."

In the September Spectator the campaign reaches a lower level of degradation, but also becomes more clearly the Fascist line. The numbers opens with an article called *The*

Newest Psychosis, by George Weiss, Jr. The newest psychosis is Germanophobia, says this masterpiece of obscurantist nationalism. Mr. Weiss complains bitterly of the anti-Nazi "bias" of the American capitalist press! A few excerpts from the article itself best indicate its significance:

"The Times lines up its galaxy of foreign correspondents to demonstrate, with wearisome iteration, that Fascism *a l'allemande* is a reversion to ancient Teutonic barbarism. . . . The illness of King George was handled with a reverence that no German official ever could expect . . . there is a lack of objectivity in the presentation of news reports" . . . (crocodile tears) "news columns should be as dispassionate as human frailty permits" (!) "Yet generalization, carping criticism and even inaccuracies are common in the present-day reporting of the German scene."

These statements are not torn from the context of an ironic hoax. They are written by Weiss in all seriousness. But American Nazism can descend even lower, for example: "At first the Communists seize upon the watchword. Perhaps it is, 'Free Pumpenheimer!'" (the reference is to the heroic German leader Ernst Thaelmann, O.J.). "The movement spreads to the cloak-and-suiters and the Arbeiter Rings. . . . An American League to free Pumpenheimer blooms into existence. Mass meetings are held; funds are raised . . . If Pumpenheimer should renounce his beliefs and exchange Marx for Hitler, the rain would descend and the floods come, and within twenty-four hours the erstwhile martyr would be dragged into the vile dust whence he had sprung, his cousin living in Philadelphia would require a police escort," et cetera, et cetera.

No reference is made to the thousands imprisoned and tortured like Thaelmann himself, to the hecatombs of the executioner, the police-arson of the Reichstag, the hideous court-travesty of the Reichstag trials, the proscription of the poorer section of the Jewish people, the enslavement of women, the strangulation of culture . . .

Elsewhere in the same issue, Kenneth Campbell, of the editorial staff of the New York World-Telegram, writes similar bilge about the Congressional hearings relating to the Nazis. He moans over the "turgid bitterness of an atmosphere," and the alleged fact that "no chances were taken that might cause the record to show anything by way of Nazi rebuttal." Sympathy for the Nazi butchers in these writings is not even glazed over, it is not subtly implied; it is laid on thick with a sorghum brush.

Minor contributions, like *Book Bum* and *Fascist Dialogue*, continue the strain of satire at the expense of the workers and the destitute. And Mr. George S. Schuyler again defiles his blood in an incredible series of gutter-press paragraphs. Some of these purport to claim certain superiorities for Negroes (largely ascribed by the lick-spittle Schuyler to degrees of white descent), but the object is clearly to inflame white against Negro, mu-

latto against black, Negro bourgeois against Negro workers. One quotation will indicate the lubricity of method employed by this capitalist agent in the Negro ranks to distort the truth:

"One of the chief reasons for the failure of the Communists to snare more black bucks has been the poor quality of the female bait used. In these sophisticated days, it seems, something more than a mere ruddy epidermis is demanded before Sambo will quit the two old parties." In another place, Schuyler boasts that five Negroes have been acquitted of rape charges by Southern courts as against 5,000 lynched! He crowns this defense of Southern justice with the warning: "Sam Leibowitz and I.L.D. take notice."

But enough has been said to show the avowed position of the American Spectator today. Thus have the mighty fallen; the "men of honor" have come to wallow in the mire of treachery, lies and a phosphorescent inversion of "culture"; the false reputations and fake "geniuses" of the twenties are now led by such scabby hacks as Weiss, Schuyler and Co., probably lured by the hope of a subsidy from Stinnes, Krupp, Hugenberg, and the other keepers of the Hitler bankroll. Decayed literary gents, having lost their vogue,

must have money. They see the end looming. Their precarious position, which hung on the tolerance of a spend-thrift expanding capitalism, now with the rapid decay of American Capitalism, is tottering. They look longingly toward the Swastika, they yearn for the mass-executioner to support their always backward and parasitic "philosophy," for the rule of the exploiter to line their pockets.

Sherwood Anderson is one of this crew. His name appears as one of the editors in the recent issues dominated by the filth of Schuyler and Weiss. Sherwood Anderson last winter described a delegation to Hoover—sent by the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners to protest the murder of Bonus Marchers—as a kind of choice burlesque, with himself as the leading clown. This appeared in *The New Yorker*. Anderson also writes for the *Moley-Astor-N.R.A.* organ, *Today*, which vilifies the struggles of the workers. The time has come for Sherwood Anderson to declare unmistakably where he stands: with the potential Fascist assassins of *The Spectator* or with literary allies of the rising revolutionary movement in America? Between them is an abyss. There is no middle ground.

ORRICK JOHNS.

Aborted Renaissance

THE CHINESE RENAISSANCE, by Hu Shih. University of Chicago Press. \$1.50.

THERE is a fable, I remember, of a lantern that was used first as a head-light, then as a tail-light, and finally was unhooked and thrown into the ditch. At one time Hu Shih was a headlight of the advancing forces of the Chinese Revolution; later he was a tail-light; today he sputters feebly in a ditch. The revolution—and reality—has passed him by.

I remember, ten years ago, listening to a lecture by Hu Shih in Columbia University. Today, I read this book, published by a university foundation, consisting of a series of lectures delivered, again at an American University, as part of a course endowed by a religious woman for the furtherance of religion. Hu Shih, in these lectures, says less, and says it less forcibly than he did ten years ago, in the lectures I heard at Columbia.

Why he took the opportunist path, why he preferred academic honors to revolutionary honor, the sterile quiescence of university halls to revolutionary action, is hard to say. It was easier for him to be a gentleman than a labor leader, easier to speculate than to act. The loss is his—and the Chinese revolution's. For Hu Shih shows, still, in this book, his keen powers of analysis, and his brilliant expressiveness. How much better it would have been to use these talents in the fertile soil of the revolution rather than in the prattle-chambers of an American university, where only decorous echoes can be raised!

A mind cannot even stand still, though it

might wish to. It must go forward, or back. Hu Shih's mind, not having gone forward, has gone back. From the evidence in this book, the rationalist, Hu Shih, may, in time, like the frightened neo-mystical doctors of science, trying to earn for themselves the perquisites of a priesthood, ultimately propound some form of psychism.

Ten years ago Hu Shih spoke with effective irony against the "mystic" Orient; today, in these essays, he speaks of "Chinese" tendencies and characteristics of civilization, which can easily develop into the same mystic nationalism that beclouds the human mind in every capitalist country but most hysterically in Germany, Italy and Japan.

In analyzing the causes for China's backwardness especially as compared with Japan he makes some penetrating observations. He points to the absence of an effective ruling class capable of directing affairs and of a military tradition by which such a class could have maintained its control and carried through its purposes; and of the slow and accidental diffusion of Western civilization in China as compared with the rapid but controlled assimilation in Japan. On the other hand the more important economic factors are ignored. The fact that capitalist production found conditions more favorable in Japan than in China is not touched upon, and the power of a capitalist economy over a feudal economy is glanced off.

This omission defines at once both Hu Shih's limitations and his prejudices. It prepares one for the distorted history he subsequently gives of the Chinese Renaissance.