

POLITICS

FBI

Winter, 1948

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MR. J. EDGAR HOOVER Gee-Whiz Man No. 1

See pp. 19-25 for the most complete study yet made of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: its growth in personnel and power since 1940 . . . its loquacious, orchidaceous, and not-very-efficacious Director . . . its files bulging with anonymous gossip . . . its real record as a law-enforcing agency. By Clifton Bennett.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

ALEXANDER HERZEN, 1812-1870. Twelve pages by and about a great and strangely neglected political writer.

GANDHI. Notes by Mary McCarthy, Nicola Chiaromonte, James Agee, Paul Goodman, Niccolo Tucci, and Dwight Macdonald. Plus selections from "Harijan."

A COMPLETE FOUR-YEAR INDEX TO "POLITICS," 1944-1947.

GANDHI

"WELL, did you hear, they got the Mahatma," said a woman faculty member, settling down at the lunch-table in a cheerful, newsy manner. She put the word Mahatma in comical quotation marks, as though to say the Swami, the old rope-trick artist. "The Mahatma," echoed another woman member, holding her fork in the air, twinkling, reminiscent, jovial, thinking, it would seem, of the long series of fads her newspaper memory spanned—Coué, King Tut, Aimee Macpherson, the cloche hat. There was a moment of silence before the conversation was resumed on a more "responsible" level. "Nehru is much more realistic," said a male history professor in a conclusive bass. No one articulated any further thoughts. Our end of the table glared at the others in weak, defiant speechlessness: if Gandhi's life, not to mention his death, was powerless to defend him against this suavity, what was there for us to say?

When I came home in the evening, my little boy and the colored maid were talking about Gandhi too as she moved about, setting the table, and he sat on the floor, pasting stamps in his album. The little boy was angry and the old maid was sad. "They ought to have let him live out his life and finish his work in peace," she iterated quite mournfully, as if the right she claimed for him were too feeble to be anything but a plaintive mild assertion. "The dirty things . . ." said Reuel.

A little boy, an old domestic worker, myself and a few friends, we I presume, must be the people who were meant by the newspaper and radio commentators who declared, "The world was shocked to hear, etc., etc." For the world, actually, was not shocked at all, and if we few protested Gandhi's death, it was only out of our perfect impotence. We could not bring him back to life or punish his assassin or even influence others (the realists at the lunch table) to feel the slightest regret for what had happened.

And the fact is that a protest against such a death as Gandhi's, or Trotsky's, or Carlo Tresca's, can only be made to God. It is God, metaphorically speaking, that is, some ideal assumption of an unwritten law governing human conduct, that we call to account for such an outrage; it is this assumption, indeed, which is injured. A crime like this cannot be felt toward in a positive or practical manner: insofar, in fact, as we are positive and practical people, it is impossible for us fully to react to it. After all, as one of those committee-sitters said in the faculty dining-room, he was seventy-eight years old. There is no *action*, moreover, which can answer such a crime; the futility of

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writing letters to the newspapers, holding memorial meetings, even catching the criminal, has been fully demonstrated in the Trotsky and Tresca cases; action somehow misses the mark. And today, if Stalin's regime were to be overthrown and the entire GPU brought to justice, Trotsky's murder would remain unrequited, since it was not Stalin or the GPU who struck him with the alpenstock but one man who came in to his library and talked to him face to face.

The horror of Gandhi's murder lies not in the political motives behind it or in its consequences for Indian policy or for the future of non-violence; the horror lies simply in the fact that any man could look into the face of this extraordinary person and deliberately pull a trigger. The Crucifixion, the murder of Thomas à Becket, and other historical precedents notwithstanding, many of us still believe that there are limits to man's capacity for evil, that outstanding virtue gives pause to criminality, and think of Gandhi's murder, *This could not have happened*. Even the Nazis, after all, did not kill their great opponents, and were they really deterred, as some people think, by practical considerations alone? On the left, however, a new set of values seems to have appeared. On the left, it is Gandhi who can be killed or Trotsky or Tresca, men *integri vitae scelerisque puri*, while Stalin remains invulnerable to the assassin's bullet. Obviously, anyone with a matured plan and sufficient resolution could long ago have succeeded in killing this tyrant if some mysterious factor were not involved; he seems to have been protected, not only by his plainclothesmen but more powerfully by the magic ointment of the very iniquities in which he is soaked. In Gandhi's death, as in Tresca's and Trotsky's, the very amiability and harmlessness of the victim appears to

have formed part of the motive: Gandhi on his way to a prayer-meeting, the Old Man in his study, Tresca stepping out from a spaghetti dinner—the homely and domestic attitudes in which these sages were caught emphasize the horror of the crimes and suggest the reason for them; to the murderer, the serenity of the victim comes as the last straw. And the fact that these men were patently not dangerous seems to have incensed their killer against them: for the past two years, Gandhi's influence had been markedly declining; Trotsky and Tresca too no longer "counted" for anything in the world. Their murders, therefore, have an almost gratuitous character; political designs in the ordinary sense cannot explain them; was Gandhi murdered because of what he stood for in the Indian question or because what he stood for in his life—simplicity, good humor, steadfastness—affronted his killer's sense of human probability?

There is clearly some reciprocal relation between the fact that we (children, old women, and POLITICS subscribers) refuse, in a certain sense, to credit the murderer's deed and a refusal on the murderer's part to credit the existence of such a man as Gandhi in the world. And the good-natured derision accorded to Gandhi's pretensions by my colleagues at the luncheon-table is different only in degree from the angry incredulity of the killer, who immediately told reporters that he was not "at all sorry." This crime and the Trotsky and Tresca crimes also are acts, as it were, of intellectual or artistic criticism; the killer eliminates these venerable men from the human scene as the academic critic dismisses a glaring improbability in a novel.

MARY MCCARTHY

"You can wake a man who is really asleep; if he is merely pretending your effort will have no effect upon him."—Gandhi

THE picture of that half-naked fakir ascending the Viceregal Palace makes me mad." The one so aggrieved was Winston Churchill, in 1931. But the intellectual, the ideologist, the politician, the priest, the "average man" of the West, all were mad at the "fakir," fundamentally all for the same reason. That man, Gandhi, *fancied things to be too damn simple*. Civil disobedience, non-violence, the spinning wheel. You gather a crowd, walk to the sea shore, go through the motions of breaking the Salt Law, get yourself arrested assuming that in the meantime the Viceroy is beginning to feel ashamed of himself, etc., etc. "It is inconsistent with Truth to use articles about which or about whose makers there is a possibility of deception. Therefore, for instance, a votary

politics

VOLUME 5, No. 1 (Whole No. 39)

WINTER, 1948

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POLITICS is published quarterly at 45 Astor Place, New York 3, N. Y., by Politics Publishing Co. Telephone: GRamercy 3-1512.

Subscription: \$3 for one year, \$5 for two years. Add 30c a year for Canada, 50c a year for all other foreign countries. Single copy: 75c.

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