

# *C. Wright Mills* *The Last Six Months*



*by Paul Landau*

*He died on March 20, 1962 at age 46. He was an intellectual craftsman who appreciated skill and excellence in all human activities. He had built his own home in West Nyack, N.Y. The machines and appliances that he used had to survive the careful scrutiny of a craftsman's eye. His motorcycle was a BMW 500, specially designed; in autos he drove Porsches and VWs; his watch was a pilot's Rolex — which his wife gave to me after his death.*

— Saul Landau

C. WRIGHT MILLS lived a full life — much fuller than most people — and died a revolutionary, much criticized, much misunderstood, and much mourned by the few persons who really loved him.

True, he did not do all that he wished in his lifetime, and he certainly did not write all the books that he had in him. The world is poorer for this. He was married three times and each wife bore him a child. He did not have many close friends, but he traveled a great deal, met many great people, and enjoyed most of the earthly pleasures.

Nearly everyone I know has read, or knows about, some of the works of C. Wright Mills, and practically everyone has his own criticism. Liberals don't like the slightest innuendo about the United States being ruled by an undemocratic elite. Conservatives dismiss him as another pinko or Communist. Marxists (American variety) pay proper homage, but of course he doesn't really make it because he doesn't follow the sloganized line. Most "democratic Socialists," who once liked him, place him in the Soviet camp. And finally, the Soviet versions of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., suspect that Mills was a Trotskyist at heart, although they publicly acclaimed him as an enlightened bourgeois.

The heroes of his last book, *The Marxists*, are Lenin and Trotsky. How did he become a radical? This still bothers me. He was from Laredo County, Texas, which amused him.

His great passion was writing books that shook people up; next came food, liquor, motorcycles, carpentry, rifle shooting, dogs, camping equipment, sports cars, tumbling and wrestling — in no particular order. He was a man with many faults, hard to get along with, egotistical, short-tempered, good humored and bad humored, loving and hating, brilliant most of the time, sometimes petty.

When I was a sophomore in college I read *White*

*Collar*. I had just become a Marxist, ready for debate, knowing all the answers to any question, and anxious to dispute any question because it was always a bourgeois professor who asked it. Mills hardly mentioned Marx in his book, but it was as devastating a commentary on United States society as any made by a Marxist. From that time on, I followed his works.

### *July 1960*

FIVE YEARS LATER, I met C. Wright Mills in a Havana hotel. A few months later, as his research assistant, I was traveling around the world with him and his family. I think it was his size that first had me so scared. He was at least six feet tall and was overweight at about 225. He moved quickly and decisively and smoked a pipe better than any commercial I had ever seen. He wasted no time. After the briefest of amenities he began to pump me. About four hours later he had all I knew about Cuba, and some things I didn't think I knew. He had taken notes while we talked. Suddenly, he jumped up, put his notebook in his expensive safari jacket, slung two Nikons around his neck and told me that he had to go to interview "Ché" Guevara. "See you at eight in the bar for a drink. Don't be late!"

When I arrived that night, Mills was sitting at a table with a group of American friends. They were sipping daiquiris and planters' punch; he was drinking them in two swallows. The conversation was superficial, but occasionally someone made an interesting remark about Cuba. Mills would quietly slip his pad out of his pocket and write it down. No one seemed to notice, it didn't isolate him from the group or conversation. "Listen, Saul, this guy who heads the education department is taking me to dinner tonight. You think I look all right?" His bush jacket was sweat stained under the arms. He reminded me of Hemingway.

"No, clothes aren't important around here."

Mills had always been a hard worker, at times compulsive. *Listen Yankee* was his tenth book. He wrote it in six weeks. A first draft was prepared before he went to Cuba, based on reading all the available material. He read it to me in Havana. After he spent a torrid two weeks interviewing Fidel (for four days), "Ché" Guevara, Dorticos, Raúl Roa and many lesser personalities, he rewrote it completely. He hounded Ian Ballantine, of Ballantine Books, into breaking all rules for publishing books. He stayed up 16 hours a day finishing it. Then, when it was finished, he condensed it into an article for *Harpers*. He was exhausted when I spoke to him in his Columbia University office in the fall.

"My God, man, do you realize what has happened. We're going to break into the mass market. They're going to *listen*. We've hit on the new technique. NBC wants me to debate A. A. Berle on nationwide TV. Collect everything you can find on Cuba and Latin America."

I told him I would, but that he should rest a little first. But the chance to be on national TV, before some 20 million people and make Berle (a spokesman for the New Frontier) look like a fool, intrigued him. He respected Berle's intellect. He felt that he was taking on an expert in Latin American affairs. But even in October, he already had a mine of information, results of years of clipping and the widest variety of reading. He had about 400 pages of detailed notes.

I came to his office every week and we talked. The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) had asked him to address their top intellectuals. He worked furiously preparing his speech. He wrote it, rewrote it, cut it, re-cut it, edited it, and then rewrote it again. It had information, biting sarcasm, and most important, real alternatives to the policies of both the liberals and the Eisenhower administration. His eyes were ablaze and he guzzled pint after pint of black espresso coffee.

"My God, do you realize we've got them on the run?" And he laughed confidently, arrogantly, displaying all his vigor and force.

His speech to ADA was beautiful. They were furi-

ous and practically accused him of being a Communist. He was answering questions for hours on the platform. He was baited, he was cursed. He stood there with the most compelling arguments, with proof, facts, statistics, documentation of all kinds. He did not convince one of them.

"Goddamn liberals. They are political idiots."

In his fury he found a good word for liberals. He was almost spluttering. "Liberal obfuscators. Obfuscators." He laughed. "I'm going to rack them. Listen, that first chapter of *The Marxists* is going to rack them up. Obfuscating bastards."

I sent him clippings and notes and spoke to him on the phone. He was still working from early in the morning till late at night. He was annoyed that he had to teach. It took time.

The TV debate was scheduled for early in December. Mills felt that it would be a first and perhaps last chance — not for him so much — for a rational alternative to be presented to large numbers of people. TV would show what Berle's position was: suicide; it would present to all the New Frontiersmen a reasonable and logical approach to Cuba and Latin America, a way out of a terrible situation; finally, Mills had a pointed critique of past United States policy *vis-à-vis* Latin America. Mills felt that it was up to him to do it.

He was never a Commu-

nist, never belonged to any organization or group. Further, he was 100 per cent American by birth and had a trace of a Southern accent. He was the only radical with a national reputation and a clean record (no Red connections). He was burdened by this responsibility; he worked harder as the debate neared. By early December his preparation was complete. He had enough material to write a definitive work on modern Latin America.

The afternoon of the big day someone told me that Mills had had a heart attack the night before. I didn't believe it, pushed it out of my mind. We turned the TV on. The announcer said that Mills could not make it because he was ill. Berle waltzed through the debate with Congressman Porter. It was a farce. Mills was in some hospital, practically dead.



C. Wright Mills—April, 1964



The vigorous man I met in Havana lay in bed, trying to recover from a near fatal heart attack. Mills got a sort of childlike kick out of taking medicines at first. When I first visited him after the attack—just after I returned from Cuba in January, 1961—he joked about his ailment, or half-joked. He lounged in bed, forcing a laugh with each sentence. His laugh became more depressing months later when the novelty had worn off, and the full meaning of impending death became clear, and all the things that he had to do would not be done—by him, anyway.

He violated the doctor's orders from the outset. He began work on *The Marxists*. He clipped the New York Times religiously. The invasion of Cuba was being planned. Many of Mills' ex-friends and associates had attacked him for *The Causes of World War III*. *Listen Yankee* clinched it: Mills had drifted onto the side of the Soviet bloc. The illness made Mills ultrasensitive to everything—The Times, Kennedy, the drift toward war and the invasion of Cuba, and the blasts of his "friends." His doctor ordered him to leave the country.

He asked me to accompany him through Europe.

## *April 1961*

MILLS BOUGHT A VOLKSWAGEN camping bus in England. He, his wife Yavaslava, his two small children, and I set out for a leisurely tour of Europe, ending up in Moscow where Mills had been invited. His friend and guide, Igor Alexandrov, told him that Soviet doctors had successfully treated certain heart conditions, and Mills was anxious both to try it out, and to see the USSR again.

Mills was terribly grouchy and uneasy as we drove toward Switzerland. He felt, I think, an overall frustration. He spoke often of dying. He felt that his strength had been sapped by his heart attack, that he had lost his virility, that he was growing old.

We were in La Violette, a 13-room, 150-year-old chalet in the Alps for about a month. In that time Mills reworked *The Marxists* three times. He worked hard for about four to six hours each day. He stopped at about one or two o'clock in the afternoon. Then he lay down in the safari bed with a cheap detective novel. He awoke about five o'clock after a two hour nap, and ate a gigantic meal. Then he drank a little, took two sleeping pills, and went to bed. I was sure he would die, and yet I felt he could not die. He was too strong. He had so many insights and profound ideas, he sized up situations and could cut through the surface. He was a big man intellectually and physically, and yet—always and yet.

After *The Marxists* was finished and sent off to the publisher, La Violette became really deadly. We all felt

that we had accomplished a great deal. Mills had finished his update of *Listen Yankee*, made the final selections for *The Marxists*, and finished his 50,000 word commentary. I felt that I was a good assistant. More books on many subjects lay ahead. And *The New Left* was always with us.

I was carried along by Mills' moods, and never realized it until someone else had pointed it out. His rage after the Cuban invasion and Kennedy's bellicose speech lasted for a good three months. I was also outraged, but his capability to be outraged far exceeded mine. It was a question of right or wrong, and he knew Kennedy was wrong.

"We're going to show them with this update of *Listen Yankee*." He was self-conscious about showing his morality. He disguised it with a bombastic remark.

"Sit down, Saul, I want you to type this part on Kennedy." He sat at the table with his architect's pencil and his pad.

"Ha." It was the laugh that he reserved for intellectual practical jokes. He was getting ready to take on Kennedy and his mind was his weapon.

"In his campaign President Kennedy convinced many that there would really be a New Frontier. (Capitalize that.) The New Frontiersmen who took up the cry were many of the best known liberal academicians. In Kennedy's cabinet and in advisory positions, they have shown themselves to be nothing more or less than moral *schlemiels*. (You know how to spell that? O.K.) With his decision to send the group of United States financed, trained, equipped and blessed thugs to their just rewards in the well-named Bay of Pigs, Mr. Kennedy has clearly demonstrated before the world that he has neither the brilliance of mind nor the quality of heart to qualify him for greatness, no less for destiny. And the men around him, the Schlesingers and Berles, have proven themselves to be no more than mouthpieces for immorality, spokesmen for thugs and hoodlums."

Mills loved the outrageous, to think outrageously and when possible, to act outrageously. He hated prescribed morality; he could and would stand alone in the face of an angry public.

To summarize Marx in 18 points is outrageous. This Mills did. Then he decided: "Marx was basically wrong. Look, it is obvious that the proletariat doesn't make history, no matter how much you want to stretch historical facts. At certain points in history it has been more active than at others, but clearly an elite has made and still makes world history. How anyone can deny this in the face of the modern power state is almost unbelievable . . . Now in all the overdeveloped societies, with the intricate control of the mass media, it's up to the intellectuals who have a conscience to do what must be done.

"The United States is doomed unless the change comes from the top, and the men at the top do not have the quality—perhaps no man would—to alter the economic system with all its hideous assumptions and manifestations.

"Do you ever think, say, what the United States will look like in ten years?"

"Good God, man, if we are still alive I do not plan to live there. Ha, ha. Really, how could any man of sensibility bear it?" He had joked before about not returning. His laugh sounded almost hysterical. I felt that he saw himself as a prophet who knew the words would fall on deaf ears. But he had to do what he had to do.

Anyway, his beard looked good. He resembled Hemingway, and although at first it was unintentional, he began to identify more and more with him. Hemingway had committed suicide a few days before, and it shook Mills up. He talked about it for hours and then every day he would analyze it.

I tried to change the subject and failed.

"Look, he was used up. The man hadn't written anything for ten years. He was used out. What else was there for him to do. He had done it all, and he wrote himself out. That's me." And he laughed.

Three days later he looked so much like the last photo of Hemingway that I panicked. He was wearing his bush jacket, and his jaw was grimly set, making his gray and black beard fit snugly into the contours of his face.

## June 1961

WE ARRIVED EARLY with K. S. Karol of L'Express at the left-bank, Paris restaurant. Mills was nervous. He was always early for appointments. When Sartre arrived with Mme. de Beauvoir, there was that annoying, uncontrollable twitch in his eye which even the dark glasses did not cover.

Sartre and de Beauvoir not only agreed with Mills about the state of the world, but they felt that even the wonderful uniqueness of Cuba would go the way of the Soviet world.

Sartre began to speak about Cuba. "*Alors*," he said in his deep voice. Karol translated for Mills. "I do not plan to return to Cuba for some time. I am afraid that I might not like what I see. The people who were interested in culture, I think, will be miserable in the future. Unfortunately, they are not revolutionaries—but very nice boys."

Mills was not so sure. "But don't you feel Fidel will keep it straight and honest?"

"*Alors*. Fidel is a good man, a great man, and certainly an honest man, but as the revolution is forced into rigid ideological positions and the economy and defense become more rationalized and bureaucratized,

Fidel will lose some of his power to various chiefs on the hierarchy. It is unfortunate, but I think it is coming very soon."

"I tend to agree with you on the direction, but I think there's a chance that it will keep on its unique course if the original men keep leadership."

Sartre felt that it was beyond Fidel's control. The United States would assure that the United States was the enemy. Cuba's direction would be rapidly to the Soviet bloc. As for culture, Sartre did not think that the *Lunes de Revolución* crowd had the stuff to hold out against the sectarians, and this would lead to stultifying of culture. Sartre still felt that Cuba was the bright spot of the world.

Mills agreed, but he felt that the originality of the leaders would be strong enough to keep many of the good things.

In the end, both men cursed the United States, and this brought a discussion of what the future of the United States would be.

Mills told Sartre and de Beauvoir that the Kennedy administration was a liberal obfuscation.

Sartre liked the term, and he laughed.

"The liberals," said Mills, "have nothing to offer. Their ideology is no longer ideology, properly termed, but a confusing and contradictory rhetoric. Their policies, based on the popular myths of freedom and democracy, are unreal and dangerous. And there is no opposition except from the right."

"What is the significance of the Kennedy Administration, that is, how do you explain it in terms of your power elite?"

"It represents, I believe, the triumph of the political elite. During the Eisenhower Administration there was a coalition of the economic and military groups. They made foreign policy and internally catered to the short run needs of businessmen. This is just a schematic formulation, but I think it is useful. With the victory of Kennedy and his liberal intellectuals the military and the economic were subordinated. The intellectual advisors that surrounded Kennedy developed an elaborate rhetoric, and perhaps a vague long-range policy. There will be various tests, I believe, for power. The businessmen do not have much confidence in intellectuals, and may very well fight on certain issues. You might see this reflected before long in the stock market. Those businessmen and generals who cannot take orders from liberal academicians might very well join the crackpot right, which is where they emotionally belong. But basically Kennedy's policy will not differ noticeably from the Eisenhower-Dulles policy. The names will change, the rhetoric will be more elaborate, but there will be no loosening. If anything, defense spending will increase at the same time that the liberal intellectuals will challenge the military. You see, I do not believe that the

three elites will have a basic falling out. There will be minor contests over minor issues, but on foreign policy the intellectuals are, if anything, more fanatical and doctrinaire anti-Communists than the businessmen and generals. Eventually they will reach an agreement, probably after several tests of political strength. I do not have much hope that Kennedy will – or can – or wants to – alter fundamentally the Cold War policy.

Sartre looked glum.

Karol documented Mills' theory. "Schlesinger," he said, "is equal to any Cold Warrior in his fanaticism and doctrinaire anti-Communism."

Sartre listened with interest and added his agreement.

Mills, erect in his chair, his Texas accent giving great force to his words, declared the United States was the stronghold of reaction, that there was practically no hope.

Mills was under a pressure that perhaps Sartre had already gone through; or perhaps being an American and having a bad heart and more energy than it was healthy to use, Mills felt that he had so many things to do that were urgent. Sartre had done what he could as an intellectual. So had Mills. But with each day Mills felt a heavier burden, the world's anguish on his shoulders.

As we drove back from Paris to the chalet in Switzerland, Mills was relaxed. He had had a good time, and he was excited about his next books, *Tovarisch* and *The New Left*. "You know what? I'm going to create four characters: a Russian revolutionary, a real revolutionary, a man who's interested in bringing communism. Then we'll have an official ideologist, you know, the Soviet version of Schlesinger. Ha ha. Then we'll take an American official liberal, Schlesinger himself, and finally a Latin American revolutionary. My God, man, can't you see it? They'll all die when they read it. Just a dialogue on the key issues in the world. Each one will explain his outlook, and then they'll debate it."

"That's a big job."

"Sure, we'll do it together. I'll show you how to conduct an interview, and how to put together the results. I already have about 70 interviews with Soviet intellec-

tuals, and we already know what Fidel thinks, and Schlesinger – ha ha – we'll tell him exactly what he is thinking."

"Who will be the New Left spokesman?"

"That's a separate thing."

"What's missing in *The New Left* book?"

He sat back with a grin on his face. I knew what was coming.

"The New Left, that's what's missing. We begin the book with an attack on liberalism, after we accurately state their position. That stuff is already done in other books, but we'll do it again. This time we use the word obfuscators, liberal obfuscators. Then we talk about the old left, the futilitarians, and the orthodox left in the Soviet bloc. Then we take the discussion of Marxism into the practical field: What does it mean for each group – old left, liberals, and new left?"

"You know," I said, "that you still leave yourself open

with the claim that the radical intelligentsia has been the revolutionary agency in the modern world?"

"My God, that's obvious."

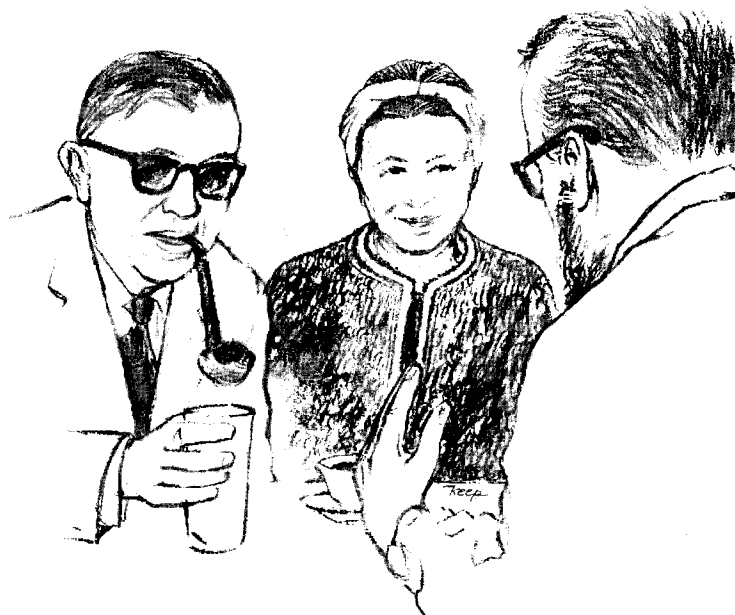
"In other words, you feel that Marx's concept of revolution was all wet?"

"Come now, don't be an obfuscator. The professional Marxists have gone to great lengths to prove that Marx was never wrong; his obvious errors are really misinterpretations by people who have purposely misread him. My

God, man, Marx believed that the working classes in Western Europe would develop into a class-conscious revolutionary force that would overthrow the Capitalists. For Marx, the proletariat was the history-making agency. Now any fool can see that it's not true . . . And you know what Marx thought of the Russian peasant, despite official attempts to make it mean something else."

Mills lit a cigar and took a drink of cognac.

"Look, in order to develop a New Left, we have to kick this labor metaphysic. No working class in the United States or Western Europe is going to revolt in the foreseeable future. Surely Lenin and Trotsky didn't sit around and wait for that to happen – and damnit, it's perfectly obvious that they were the only Marx-



Mills, Sartre and Mme. de Beauvoir exchange views.

ist revolutionaries who combined their theory and practice.”

Mills discussed Marxist dialectics. He did not plan to include it in *The Marxists*. I argued with him that it was impossible to write a book about Marx, no less *The Marxists*, without discussing dialectics. He disagreed: “I have three degrees from universities, two in philosophy and one in sociology. I have read the most difficult stuff in English and German. If you cannot — or anyone cannot — explain it to me so that I can understand it, then I refuse to buy it.”

Nevertheless, he read and reread the criticisms of the Marxist scholars, and he reread articles on dialectics. Finally he decided he was right. Dialectics was added to *The Marxists* as a footnote.

## *August 1961*

THE SOVIET UNION was a tremendous let-down. For one thing, we had driven from Warsaw to the border at Brest, without seeing anything attractive. Mills was droll and irritable. I drove. Mills cursed Polish peasants and Polish roads. He had chest pains every few hours. As we approached the USSR he began to meet the reality: his chances of finding a doctor who would prescribe a cure to his satisfaction was impossible.

Mills lectured me on the USSR. I insisted that whatever the faults and flaws, there must be a superior type of human being produced by a Socialist country. Mills told me no, and he told me no many times.

“They’re going to make it. But it’s a different world. Buddy, you wouldn’t like to live here. They’re hicks. Real hicks. They go nuts when they see a big modern machine.”

We were still in Moscow when the Russians announced that Titov was orbiting around the earth. Throngs of people were cheering in Red Square as every few minutes a voice announced another orbit or a communication from Titov to Khrushchev. Igor (our translator and guide) arrived at the hotel in a state of euphoria. Mills and I had heard the news from everyone we met who spoke English; so when Igor burst in with: “Did you hear the news?” Mills yawned and said, “No.”

“We have another cosmonaut, and he has already circled the earth eight times, imagine eight times.”

Mills remained unmoved. “I hope he’s taking a different route. The scenery must be boring him.”

“You are always joking.” Igor refused to be thwarted. “Do you realize what this means for science? Soon we will be on the moon.”

“What will you do there?”

“That is not important. It will liberate all mankind.”

“I thought that was the job of the Communist revolution?”

“No, Professor Mills, you do not understand?”

“Now Igor, what kind of Communist are you?”

“A good one I hope, but you do not see what this means for progress.”

“It’s a lot of baloney.”

“What means baloney?”

“Junk, stupidity, waste of time, money, effort and intelligence. Why don’t you solve your agricultural problems instead of fooling around with all this space nonsense?”

Igor tried in vain. Mills became crueler. He thoroughly disbelieved in “this space foolishness” or this “atmospheric bunkum,” as he called it.

“When you produce a Gagarin of culture, then you will have made it.”

When Igor left, his euphoria transformed into acute depression, Mills became morose. His jocular attitude was gone, replaced by concern over his illness and the failure of the Soviets to face some of the real problems on earth.

Igor took us to the permanent exhibition the next day. Mills already knew what the Russian doctors were going to tell him. Igor passed off Mills’ sarcasm of the day before as typical American sour grapes, and was ready to begin anew to convince us that socialism was superior — which Mills accepted anyway but would not admit to Igor, a Communist.

Mills liked Igor a great deal. Igor was dedicated, intelligent, sensitive, and quite flexible. Igor had great respect for Mills, always calling him “Professor Mills.” Maybe it was Igor’s stability that bothered Mills. He was happily married, sure in his world and his convictions. The USSR was a good Socialist State. It could and surely would be better every year; but it was the best in the world right now.

This was Mills’ second visit to the Soviet Union. He was as ambivalent now as he had been the first time. On the one hand he would say: “They’re hicks.” And then: “My God, these people are going to make it.”

I would ask him what he meant.

“I mean they’re going to make a Communist society just as they say. But it will be very far from what you or I would picture as an ideal. But you must consider that there are today in this country many intellectuals, and just average people, factory workers and students, who are actively thinking about making communism. That is truly amazing.”

“But what,” I persisted, “do you mean by hicks, and what is ‘making it’?”

“They are provincial. They do not know the rest of the world. There are leading Soviet intellectuals who have no conception of life in the United States, who really believe in the vulgar Marxist ideology. They have not read Freud, and they have not read Trotsky. Do you realize they do not have an accurate knowledge



of their own revolution?”

He stopped. We were walking into Red Square. An enormous crowd of people, mostly women in ugly print dresses and colored kerchiefs, waited to see Lenin in his tomb.

Mills did not have to say anything. The crowd was truly another world. Igor, educated, well-dressed and sophisticated, had only one thing in common with these people: they were all born in the USSR.

Mills continued: He had great respect for the Soviet Union because of what it had done and because of what it was about to do. It had nothing to do with Titov or Gagarin, but rather with the complete transformation of society. While Mills had serious reservations, he could not help but admire it.

On the street we saw volunteer militia men directing traffic. “Look at that,” Mills said, laughing. “They are serious about abolishing the State. That is difficult for us to understand, that there are people here who are seriously thinking about communism. It isn’t what you or I think about when we think of communism, but there is no doubt that this is a serious goal.”

The Party had recently described its goals, one of which was to provide free bread and transportation. Moscow buses had a three kopek fare (three cents) and used the equivalent of the honor system since there was no conductor to take fares. “You see,” Mills said as we rode the bus, “if someone does not pay his fare they will post his photo on all the buses in Moscow with a sign saying Ivan Ivanovich has committed a crime against the people of Moscow. They won’t put him in jail however.”

“But,” I said, “that would be much worse than prison.”

“To you,” he laughed, “but Tovarisch doesn’t think so. He agrees with punishment by the community. More and more petty crimes and misdemeanors are being treated by these comradely courts, which are being effective and are, in all truth, the first step toward withering away the State.”

“They intend to build a classless society and many people are devoting themselves to precisely that task, as they call it. On the other hand they want to surpass us. They have gotten what Marx called ‘the commodity fetish – or reification.’ You see how illogical, and yet how natural. We will bury you. We will surpass you. You are decaying and dying. We will do it better. And yet Comsomols go to Siberia on their vacations to plant trees in virgin land. They are eliminating the police. This is serious business. They are really withering the State away.”

“How do you feel about it?”

“As with everything here I feel ambivalent. They have done away with some of the state machinery and replaced it by perhaps even more rigid societal controls, an old technique. You have read Tonnies. You know

what the essential difference between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* is. Well, that is essentially it. They have started to organize an industrially advanced, technologically based society, and returned to a primitive kind of law and control.

“It’s truly a different world, and this makes any moral judgment very difficult.”

We saw no prostitutes in the Soviet Union and in all our discussions with our Russian friends there was no mention of sex. A lady Soviet literary critic, in her mid-fifties, specializing in English and American literature, criticized D. H. Lawrence for his preoccupation with sex. “Otherwise I think he’s a great writer. But most of modern American writing today is concerned with sex. That is not something that should be written about in literature or discussed publicly.”

I told Mills about this and after thinking for a few minutes while he carried on some banter, he concluded that this was logical. “When there is so much public life there must be a part that is kept private, and besides it is in the great Russian Puritan tradition. Try to think of a sexy novel written before the revolution.”

When Mills was with the Soviet officials he made them work. He never granted anything, and had they not known of his books they might have thought him to be a reactionary. But he wanted to draw them out, and he did, often embarrassing them. On his last night he was an honored guest at a party which many Soviet officials attended. He drank too much vodka.

Mills was toasted by Soviet officials and he returned their long-winded toasts with short and often barbed remarks. Finally, after he had downed at least eight vodkas, he turned to Igor:

“Here,” he chuckled drunkenly, “is to the day when the complete works of Trotsky are published and widely distributed in the Soviet Union.”

Igor was visibly upset, hoping that no one else had heard. He tried to interrupt Mills on a medical pretext. Mills was not going to be interrupted.

“On that day the USSR will have achieved democracy.”

Mills left the USSR soon after. Soviet doctors could not cure him, and Soviet society both inspired and depressed him. It was going somewhere, and much of the world would imitate it, but there were many things about it that disgusted Mills. He was, after all, a cosmopolitan Texan.

## September 1961

WHEN I LEFT Mills in London he claimed that he did not plan to return to the United States for many years. As a joke – sort of – he would say: “It’s a great place to visit. Maybe I’ll go there for a six week vacation.” He had found a little house in the north end



of London and planned to have an idyllic family-work syndrome. He tried to get excited about the idea of going British. He told Yara that she would have to kick the overdeveloped American fetishes like washing machines. "The British, after all, don't have them. Besides, this is a more civilized country. A man can feel free in this country. People respect other people here."

"Why do you think so?"

"I figure because it's been so damned crowded and congested that it was the only way to get along."

"You really plan to stay?"

"Why not? I'll get a few good students around me, work up a seminar. The new university in Brighton will give me a secretary. I'll get a red nose, begin to snioke the pipe again. Good God, man, this is the life!" He was obviously homesick.

I would buy *The New York Times*, as I had done when we first came to London and we would sit down and discuss it, and clip and laugh, and then he would get a pain in his chest when he read that Kennedy was planning new evil against Cuba, or that Marines were being sent to Southeast Asia. I got scared. He took a noroglycerine, and we put away the paper until the next morning. But then, especially when we arrived in Eastern Europe, it became extremely difficult to buy *The Times*. So as Mills put it, we "kicked it." But now, back in England, we were hooked once more and I made my morning sortie to north London and we went through a paper again. He did not take the same concern now. Too many big things were bothering him. He refused to get chest pains over Cuba or South Vietnam. It was all one world now, all headed toward something new. He had a job to do, to offer the world the best of his brain.

Mills felt at least four more books in him: *The Contrast of the USSR and the United States (Tovarisch or Contacting the Enemy)*; then there was the long awaited book on The New Left, the final blast against the liberals, an attack on old time Marxists and Socialist futilitarians, and a bold new springboard for revolutionary intellectuals and students with imagination. His grand work was to be a world-wide sociological study of each nation of consequence in all the blocs of nations. And finally he had a book on Latin America.

But in London, he looked defeated. He promised to start work, but he lounged, read detective stories that didn't hold his attention, and drank. He didn't want to stay in London. But where else could he go. He didn't want to call the United States home. He loved his house in West Nyack with its conveniences (after all he had built it himself). But he was ashamed to be an American, ashamed to have John F. Kennedy as his President. He was embarrassed and ashamed. He felt that as a sociologist, he was responsible to the world. When politicians are taken in by their own ridiculous rhetoric,

when the crackpot realists go unopposed down their destructive roads, when all that looms ahead is more gadgets, more suburbs, more rhetoric, space nonsense, and academic *schlemiels* making good in the Democratic Party — when there is that to look forward to, you can't go home again, or maybe you don't want to call home "home." But for a truly 100 per cent American there is no other possibility. Mills knew he would return.

Mills was my intellectual idol. Now that I knew him as a man, I could see his weaknesses, and my feelings toward him changed. The dynamo I first met in Havana had all the fears and shortcomings of millions of men. He tried to hide them as most of us do, but he was unsuccessful. To anyone who knew him well, he was often a source of irritation. But it was more than his intellectual brilliance and energy that made his few friends devoted. He was a very sick man, one who was statistically due for death. He knew it, and in the last two years of his life he felt obliged to take on problems no man could hope to solve. He wanted to give the thinking world a real alternative to the disaster he foresaw. It was no longer sufficient for him to analyze, to criticize. He viewed the hungry nations, as he called them, in an abstract way. He had never experienced hunger. But the remarkable thing was his ability to feel impassioned, with hate and bitterness, over their plight. This drove him to work. There was an egotistical part of it also. He felt great when he wrote a book and took a craftsman's delight in the finished product. But he did want to change the world, and he knew that his unusual ability and energy had to be used in that way. But he also knew the hopelessness of any man or group of men, intellectuals, attempting to combat the power of nuclear establishments.

Everyone who knew Mills realized that he would return to the United States. He tried to convince everyone that he believed his own highly-romanticized picture of England, that in a snug little cottage at Brighton he would write books by the warm fire, and would lecture to a group of New Left graduate students who would begin a movement that would turn into a New Left. Cuba, England, Germany — they were great for a visit. His personality, his whole being, had an American stamp. He had to return. He hated the United States, its politics, its culture, its "high immorality." But he did not fit anywhere else, and he did not want to be anywhere else but in his own house. It would be painful to be in the United States and read *The New York Times*, and face law suits, and petty professors writing personal attacks — to be in the same country that was preparing another invasion of Cuba, that would be testing bombs, and making counter revolutions in little countries. Just reading the newspapers and not being able to do anything — it gave him chest pain.

He often was surprised when people knew who he was, or when he was asked to use his name for this or that cause. He saw himself as a strong man, an individual, who would not abide the political immorality over which he, as an individual, as an intellectual, had no control, no matter how many best-sellers he wrote. He always quoted his grandfather, "Every man should have one gun, one vote — and one woman at a time."

### *January-March 1962*

WHEN HE RETURNED to the United States less than a year later, he was resigned. He would face his own country after a short vacation, and he would do what he could. He stopped drinking and went on a diet. He tried to write on the New Left, but his heart gave out shortly after his return. For the young radicals it was the death of a prophet. I tried to separate my personal grief. Yes, we felt even more alone now that he was dead.

I wish I were speaking for my generation, but I only speak for a few young radicals and intellectuals. Mills did not have to continuously harp on "the great American democratic heritage." He was an American and there was no question of identification. When he briefly tried self-exile he was more miserable than ever. When he died we felt that the last moralist had died. He was searching for answers, and in some almost mystical way, the generation I spoke of expected him to provide a new way, a moral solution, or at least a clue.

He was not a prophet. I knew him as a human being. He was a diligent scholar, brilliant and imaginative. He was humble about the things he should have been proud of, and boastful about characteristics that were common to many men. When he wrote a book he constantly questioned his own judgment; when he rode a motorcycle or built his own house he felt superior to everyone.

Hemingway committed suicide in his futile attempt to find a hero that satisfied him; Mills became more desperate as his search for answers was thwarted, not by any inherent lack of ability or imagination, but by the world he lived in. The moralist-sociologist, in search of a New Left — an alternative to madness — he no longer felt the satisfaction he once did when he completed a book. He had taken the world on his back, but he had a bad heart. He felt it was his duty to be the conscience of the world, but each day, with new rejections from old friends, new sellouts to liberal obfuscations, and more distressing news in *The New York Times*, made the very idea of a man being a conscience for such a world seem ridiculous to him. And yet, he could not rid himself of, as he called it, "this moral anguish which is crushing me."

### *Epilogue*

Many intellectuals and students have begun to meet their obligations as privileged men. They have pursued a politics of truth, exposing and attacking the assumptions of the Cold War, in Vietnam and in the Dominican Republic. Some of these same intellectuals — professors, students, writers, artists — sneered several years ago when C. Wright Mills said they would form the basis of the New Left. In the "teach-ins" and other demonstrations of dissent, a group of American intellectuals, their consciences stimulated by the moral conviction — if not the physical courage — of students and Negroes, have formed a political public that may offer resistance to the NATO intellectuals.

---

SAUL LANDAU, a *RAMPARTS* staff writer, is an editor of *Studies on the Left* and a director of the *San Francisco New School*.



**"G**OD CANNOT REMEMBER all the horrible things the Arabs did here. So we will help Him remember."

The taxi driver searched his own memory as we drove from the airport to Zanzibar Town. "When I was a boy, my grandfather told me stories of what the Arabs did before the British came to Zanzibar. They used to carve open the bellies of pregnant African women because they were curious to see what the baby looked like inside."

*Zinj-el-barr*, the "Land of the Black Man," has been untrue to its name since the isle was so dubbed by the first Arabs who spotted it around the seventh century B.C. But now this exotically-named island belongs to the Africans again—for the first time in 2,500 years, since the days when it was part of the empire of the Kingdom of Sheba.

Zanzibar, heady with the odor of cloves, will suffer from the after-effects of its revolution for some time to come. This is obvious. But, since the island's novel link with Tanganyika cannot be expected to solve all its problems, a look at Zanzibar's bizarre, unparalleled history might better place current events there in proper perspective. (This link has made Zanzibar part of the Union of Tanzania, but for the purposes of this histor-

ical glance, the original name will eliminate confusion.)

If anyone can fairly take responsibility for Zanzibar's new freedom, which must also include the recent slaughter of about 2,000 Arabs and its present leanings as a People's Republic toward China, it should be the British Colonial Office. This dispensary of independence turned over the reins of government to a clique of rich Arab landowners and aristocrats whose ancestry can be clearly traced to the days when their forefathers roamed the bush under the Sultan's red flag in pursuit of their black quarry. It doesn't take much to understand why the African majority on the island, themselves the descendants of slave rejects, rather resented this Arab plutocracy.

"Communists Do It Again," the headline writers assured the American public on the first days after the January 12 revolution. And 27-year-old John Okello, the key military figure who reportedly spent two years in Havana prior to the upheaval, was cited as unim-

---

JOEL LIEBER, a free-lance writer, has appeared in *The Nation*, *The Realist*, *Pageant* and other journals. He has worked on special assignments for *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *United Features Syndicate* and *NANA*.