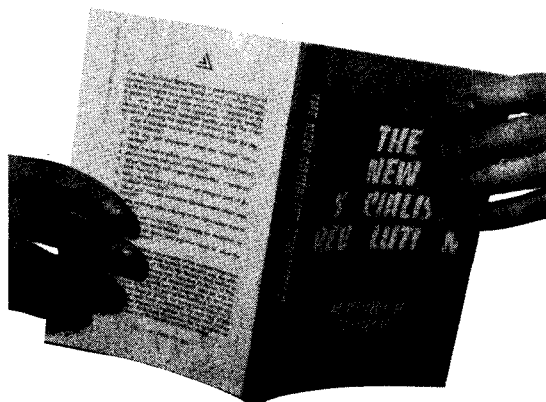


After the New Left



The New Socialist Revolution, by Michael Lerner, Delacorte, \$2.95.

In the first years of this century, when we had a socialist movement, we had a socialist literature, too. Millions of copies of socialist or anarchist books, pamphlets and journals were read by farmers and workers. Socialist weeklies, and sometimes even dailies, flourished in major cities all over the country. Radicals of the times knew these publications were as important as strikes and demonstrations.

Part of that rich stream of literature lasted into the Thirties, surviving first the Palmer raids and the reactionary Twenties, and then the ideology of the New Deal and the gray dogmatism of the Communist Party. And some socialists also knew how to write English: the graceful and illuminating writings of Leo Huberman drew me closer to socialism, even though I read his *Man's Worldly Goods* and *The Truth About Socialism* many years after they first came out.

But after World War II came McCarthyism and the isolation and shrinking of the Left; with it shrank what was left of libertarian socialist writing. It was kept alive by a small journal here, a pamphlet there, but the

flames burned low.

By the 1960s, young activists were marked by an anti-theoretical and anti-educational bent. The great mindless slogan, "less talk, more action," was a commentary not just on people's impatience but on the absence of political culture, as well. Even though many of the New Left's mentors were professed keepers of the faith (Staughton Lynd, Herbert Marcuse, Daniel Cohn-Bendit), socialists and socialism had been discredited. The ravages of Stalinism had left their mark. The stream of socialist literature was too narrow to sustain a widely-held vision of a libertarian socialism that would not have the injustices and autocracy of the Soviet Union.

By the beginning of the Seventies there were as many sectarian versions of socialism in America as varieties of Campbell's soup. Yet underlying them all has been a vague but pervasive belief that the American people will not now accept socialist ideas; that we should not use the word; that the task of radicals is to mobilize around immediate issues. And underlying these feelings in turn hides a vague contempt many radicals have for the American people: they are too dumb, too brainwashed to think about socialism, and so we have to talk of more concrete things.

Many radicals also seem to feel that a crisis in capitalism itself, without any widespread socialist vision, will be sufficient to bring the tottering edifice down. In response to all this, Staughton Lynd once said that if socialism is to ever become a serious political force in America, it must come out of the closet.

Michael Lerner's *The New Socialist Revolution* openly argues for leaving that closet. He is critical of both the Old and New Left for their aversion to talking frankly about revolutionary politics. He excoriates the American Communist Party's subservience to the Soviet Union, and the Socialist Workers Party's concentration on sectarian single-issue campaigns. More important, he rescues socialist ideas from the authoritarian clothes in which—in many people's eyes—they have been imprisoned since Stalin. Lerner's socialism is democratic

without being reformist, complicated without being obscure. And, unlike most Old Left socialists, he does not assign questions of culture and personal life to be dealt with in the post-revolutionary future.

Some of the best parts of *The New Socialist Revolution* are those which show the futility of changing capitalism profoundly through liberal reform. Lerner appreciates that the Sixties saw the emergence of a new militancy masked as radicalism: parts of the black and anti-war movements, for example, which were willing to go to the streets when normal channels failed to produce change. Yet he shows how militancy masked the liberal content of many of these actions. He provides a trenchant critique of the Leftists who supported McGovern in 1972. He carefully distinguishes between the early days, when McGovern's program appeared somewhat systematic rather than piecemeal, and the post-Miami campaign. Lerner shows convincingly how, once he was the Democratic candidate, McGovern "backed away from the seeming 'radicalism' of the movement built around him, surrounded himself with Pentagon and Administration figures of the LBJ years . . . and repudiated his former programs for tax reform, fair welfare, and dramatic military cutbacks."

There are some problems, though, in other parts of Lerner's analysis. For the most part, he summarizes standard New Left doctrine without adding much to it. For example, he repeats the notion of the special oppression of blacks and women, and says neither racism nor sexism is in the interests of those who practice it. But he makes no attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the forces that shape racism from within the white working class itself, to show how it arises from the very division of labor. He apparently accepts the views of liberal historians like Oscar Handlin and Peter Blau, who celebrate the achievement of America in assimilating European immigrants, and say that blacks were singled out to remain on the bottom because of their color and their heritage of slavery.

But there are deeper reasons which Handlin, Blau and Lerner all leave untouched: blacks continued working on

by Stanley Aronowitz

the Southern cotton and tobacco plantations *after* Emancipation, precisely because these commodities were vital to getting industrial capital (cotton was America's chief export until after the turn of the century). The parallels today are the Turks in Italy and West Germany, West Indians in England, Algerians in France—all cheap labor necessary for economic expansion. There are a host of other economic causes of racism—for example, the use of blacks as scab labor in the 1890s and the conscious policy of the steel companies then to create a highly stratified, ethnically divided labor force—which Lerner does not examine.

Lerner does better on sexism, showing its origins in the economic positions of women at home and at work. But he takes a narrowly ideological view too often. I would have liked to see more discussion of work, for instance. He recognizes the boredom and discontent most people—even those not in the working class—feel with their jobs, but doesn't put enough emphasis on this as an argument for a socialist society. This weakness is particularly startling since, when he gets to the program portion of his book, he emphasizes workers' control of factories—rather than state ownership—as the substance of a socialist vision.

Yet in the end these are small criticisms of an otherwise admirable work. Lerner's argument against the parliamentary road to socialism seems to have been borne out by the tragic downfall of Allende. In a period when too many people are still looking to the Thirties and Forties for guidance as to what is to be done, he is timely in his insistence that, in the main, the new socialism must be an extra-parliamentary movement. His book is the best introduction to libertarian socialist thought produced in this country in recent years. *The New Socialist Revolution* is indispensable for anybody who has found out that the system does not work, and who wants an alternative that is at once revolutionary and democratic. ■

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Notes from Prison

November 14, 1970

I was certainly hustled and shoved about in the world a great deal—a great deal more than most priests—ininitely more than most Jesuits. Having from the start of the Sixties, or even earlier, made up my mind that I was going to sniff the winds of the world and indeed find out, if it could be found out, what caves the winds were born in. . . . Wandering around Brooklyn in the Fifties, boating alone for a week on Lake Casenovia. In the early Sixties climbing Trembleau Mountain to pick wild blueberries and read and write. Being the first to ask for a cabin alone on that lake, thirsting for solitude, for an opposite rhythm to the studies and crowds, even the liturgies. . . .

November 16

I used to walk the filthy macadam yard at St. Peter's, Jersey City—how many years ago? Trying to put together enough reason, enough energy, to go on for another single day. In 1947. Ten years later I was walking off my private devils on the Brooklyn pavement; bedeviled by insomnia, seeing no rhyme or reason in policing and drilling kids, the day only starting after school or on weekends when we would go, a few students and I, into Manhattan's East Side to work at some storefront, to gather some neighborhood youngsters, at Walt Janer's mission center. . . . Or when I could read and study until 2 a.m., sleepless as a bat, toss until four and rise and steal out to say Mass alone.

I was back from Europe, I thought good days were ahead; I landed back where I most dreaded—high school drilling, cafeteria policing, the childish games that were supposed to prove one was with it. The headmaster, who

From the book *Lights on in the House of the Dead*. Copyright © 1974 by Daniel Berrigan. To be published in March by Doubleday & Company, Inc.

played a poker-faced politics of loyalty and no opposition allowed, one day slipped and gave away his hand: "What did you do to land here?" he asked me. Alas, I had no crime to confess to, even for my own relief. . . .

December 1

I was taken out in manacles, to testify at the trial of the Flower City draft board raiders. Was kept in solitary in West Street jail for one night. A cage on the top floor, under the big ventilators, with two Puerto Rican kids—everything including shoes taken away. . . .

They always talk churchy to me and call me "Father" as though we were in the men's room of a mortuary chapel, hushed tones, averted gaze; we know, don't we, Father, the weakness of mortal flesh and how to split the take later. . . . He came into the john and stood there while I shaved and peed; third floor up but you never know, I might take wing through the plate glass or something.

Monday, December 14

The marshal bent to putting the leg chains on us, making of Phil and myself the strangest Siamese twins of technological genetics; "Holy Cross man myself, Father. What year did you graduate?" We were off, "mad as the ice and snow," making our way across the glassy pavement to the car; belly chains, handcuffs, foot fetters, the pampered, protected, endangered priests: "Might be some of those radicals trying to free you, Fathers."

The U.S. attorney is young, a novice's first appearance. He is unsure in the first hour, more sure as he gets into "the credibility of the witness," explaining his line of reasoning to the judge. It is a matter of three letters apprehended in my shoes, months ago. I know now the government, stung by our suit on First Amendment rights of all federal prisoners, had done its homework—with the help of the kangaroo advocates, our "social workers."

January 4, 1971

Pop prison described

The pop prison: its hall of mirrors, its snack bars, comfort stops, news-

by Daniel Berrigan