

The Saturday Review



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U. S. Refrigerators vs. U. S. Ideas

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following guest editorial is by Minoo R. Masani, distinguished Indian author and former Indian ambassador to Brazil, who is prominently identified in India as a friend of the United States. Mr. Masani is at present representing India on the U.N. Subcommittee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.*

ON my way to the United States from India, I had the opportunity to read the contribution of R. H. S. Crossman in the "New Fabian Essays." Alongside of much that is reasonable and humane, Mr. Crossman propounds a thesis that calls for analysis. Having made it clear that he regards totalitarian Communism as a reactionary force which the peoples of the Atlantic community must resist, Mr. Crossman proceeds to the assumption that, to quote his own words, "the coolie in Malaya, or for that matter the tribesman in Nigeria does not want either liberty, equality, and fraternity or the dictatorship of the proletariat. He is below the level of such political aspirations." He then asks his readers to join him in accepting "both intellectually and emotionally the fact that Communism outside Europe is still a liberative force." We are then brought to a remarkable conclusion. "The American isolationist," writes Mr. Crossman, "who reacts so violently against the gigantic bill for rearmament and foreign aid, is nearer the tradition of Americanism than the New Deal prophets of America's world-wide responsibilities." Americans should, therefore, be encouraged "to take the risk in Asia and Africa of leaving unfilled the 'political vacuum' left by the dismantling of the old

European empires." "We are opposed," writes Mr. Crossman, "to Russian expansion but also to American victory."

Whatever the motivation of this line of thought may be, its implications are unfortunately hard to mistake. First, that human values are different for the peoples of Western Europe and North America on the one hand and for the peoples of the underdeveloped countries of Asia and Africa on the other. Secondly, that the claims of bread and freedom are antithetical and should in the case of the underdeveloped countries be resolved in favor of bread. Thirdly, that the West should write off these countries and these peoples and do nothing to protect them from being taken over by Communist expansion and aggression.

Here then, from a leading spokesman of "left-wing" Socialism in the West comes a strange echo of Rudyard Kipling: "East is East and West is West." East of Suez "there ain't no Ten Commandments"; and what is reaction and tyranny for the European and American is liberation and progress for the "lesser breeds without the law."

Is there perchance any truth in this assertion that the masses of illiterate and underprivileged people in Asia and Africa are just empty stomachs and hungry mouths conscious of nothing but the clamant call for food? The facts testify precisely to the contrary. While it may be true that some "left-wing" intellectuals in India, as elsewhere, are obsessed with the desirability of Soviet-model Five Year Plans and of what Lewis Mumford has called "giantism," the common people in my country are much more attached to such things as their traditional way of life, their religions and

their places of worship, their families and their homes, their cattle and their farms. While the Communist Party of India has attracted a section of the English-speaking intelligentsia and is today more entrenched among its ranks than it is among classes less privileged, the Indian masses on the other hand have, by their unique response over three decades to Mahatma Gandhi, shown that the man who evokes a response in their hearts is the one who talks to them of non-material values like God, Love, Truth, Human Brotherhood, and the Equality of the untouchable Harijan and the proud Brahman.

GANDHI represents the complete antithesis to the Communist and has been recognized as such in the Moscow press and radio for over three decades. The Communist swears by dialectical materialism—matter is essence, the mind a by-product; Gandhi preaches the supremacy of spirit of mind over matter. To the Communist, the end justifies the means; to Gandhi, the means are everything—means and ends are like the seed and the tree; and so Gandhi pronounced Soviet Communism to be "repugnant to India." Stalin preaches the need to hate the class and national enemy; Gandhi the need to love all. Communism seeks to centralize and collectivize everything; Gandhi preaches the need to decentralize and to distribute power both politically and economically. The Communist glorifies the State; Gandhi, conscious of the distinction drawn by Reinhold Niebuhr between moral man and immoral society, stresses the individual as an end in himself. Identifying himself with the lowliest in the scale of caste—the Harijan or untouchable—Gandhi recalls the words of Him who said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Those who today work for the lowliest of our people cannot escape the spirit of Gandhi. Only last month, my good friend Jayaprakash Narayan, American-educated leader of India's democratic Socialist Party, wrote: "For many years I have worshiped at the shrine of the goddess Dialectical Materialism, which seemed to me intellectually more satisfying than any other philosophy. But while the main quest of philosophy remains unsatisfied, it has become patent to me that materialism of any sort robs man of the means to be truly human. . . . It is clearer today than ever that social reconstruction is impossible without human reconstruction. Only when materialism is transcended does individual man come into his own and become an end in himself." It is ob-

vious then that for India the only genuine, the only Indian, social revolution is the one that Gandhi commenced.

I have felt it essential to stress the universality of human values so rudely questioned by Mr. Crossman because it is only too likely that his assumptions are not confined to the Bevanites in Britain and that they might indeed be shared by many men and women of good will in these United States. Let us put bread into the hungry mouths of the Asian masses, let us fill their empty stomachs, and we shall save Asia from Communism. Is there no reason to believe that along some such lines runs the thinking of many good people in your country?

Now, this line of thought is, to my mind, fundamentally fallacious. Man does not live by bread alone—not even the brown or yellow or black man. Empty minds and souls provide as good a breeding ground for Communism as empty stomachs. Czechoslovakia did not go under the Iron Curtain because its people were groaning in starvation in the months that preceded the *coup d'état* of February 1948. The model housing of Socialist Vienna provided no deterrent to Dollfuss and then to Hitler. How mistaken have been proved those prophets who foretold that once Iran lost the revenues that came to her from oil and felt the pinch, she would be brought to her senses. It would seem then that the lesson that Peter Drucker taught in his book "The End of Economic Man" is all too easily forgotten.

Asia is today asserting not only its right to economic prosperity and progress but even more to equality of status in the world family, to self-respect and dignity, to racial equality and the end of discrimination.

What decides whether a people will adhere to democracy or succumb to Communism is primarily whether or not they believe in another ideology superior to Communism, whether or not they have the will to resist, and whether or not they possess the leadership that will guide them to do so.

If I stress non-material values and incentives as against material ones, it is not that I am insensible of the value that material things and their possession have in providing a fuller life and greater dignity to the human being. Nor is this to be construed as a plea that the United States should go slow on economic aid to the underdeveloped countries. On the contrary, I have been one of those in India who were for the acceptance of United States economic aid even before it became generally acceptable. Nor again am I suggesting that the U.S. should stop rearming for the collective se-

curity of the free world against totalitarian aggression. On the contrary, I know that, to the extent that America rearms and reasserts the strength of the free world, she defends us who are militarily weaker, whether we know it or not. I do, however, urge the need to follow up economic and military cooperation on the ideological plane.

Arthur Goodfriend in his significant book "The Only War We See" makes a similar plea. Writes Mr. Goodfriend: "They [the Chinese Communists] reached the people by means of education and political indoctrination. We tried too often to win them with charity. . . . We can, as we did in China, keep mum about the shameful record of Russian Communism. Or we can attack the soft underbelly of Communism by reciting its record on the values most precious to Asians and others—religion, the family, national independence, and the ownership of the land. . . . Unless we are prepared to face up to the problem, the United States and the free world may be betrayed into a grievous error. The governments of underdeveloped peoples may rally to our side—but behind this façade the people may remain aloof and even antagonistic."

Against this background it is for Americans to assess their country's role in Asia and Africa in the months and years to come. It is for them to ask themselves: What are the real mainsprings of MSA, TCA, and Point Four? Are these great schemes of altruism, unparalleled in the world's history, founded on mere charity? If that were so, they would in the end prove unacceptable to those they seek to aid. Are they, as the cynics would have it, caused by the need to get rid of surplus goods and materials? If that were so, they would constitute a new form of exploitation. Is the defeat of Communism the sole purpose? Such a purpose is good, but in itself not adequate. I should like to think that what really actuates these great projects is Fraternity, the desire to share that one knows of in the family, and that its foundation is Love, which is conscious of another's worth. If that is so, then it appears to some of us in the Old World that Americans are letting their case go by default.

It is true that there is at least one big blot on the U.S. copy-book; the Negro has been well described as the litmus test of American democracy. That indeed is the Achilles's heel of the U.S. The rulers of South Africa would appear to be inviting catastrophe on themselves and on the world, and the voice of the United States has not been noticed as among the loudest in protest. But despite these blemishes, there is such a lot that the U.S. can share besides the material goods that she



provides. Love of freedom and the standing up for one's rights; equality of status—talking back when one's human dignity is offended, no matter by whom; self-help—doing things for oneself without waiting for the Government; the spirit of adventure—exploring the frontiers of knowledge, being "frontier-minded and not fate-bound"; generosity—giving freely, risking one's life for a stranger; the concentration of skills and effort to serve a single human being, no matter how humble; and finally, a mind that is becoming increasingly world-conscious, which recognizes that for good or ill the United States is part and parcel of the world and must share its joys and its tribulations. America has thus a "great feast of ideas" of which she can invite the rest of us to partake. It is time the world hears more about these aspects of your life and a little less about the number of your automobiles, refrigerators, and television sets. Certainly, the world needs American technicians, engineers, and chemists, but it also needs American teachers, philosophers, and social workers. The body needs sustenance, but so does the mind.

THERE is no country in the world today so well placed to lead the social revolution in Asia as America. Unfortunately, too many Asians have the impression that while America feeds the body, she starves the mind and the soul. Professor M. A. Lineberger, on the basis of his own personal experience in the Far East, presents us with a paradox. "The Americans believe in spiritual things," writes Professor Lineberger, "but they try to buy them by material means—by dollars, by gifts, by aid. The Communists believe in material things, but they offer people something to join, something to do, something to fight."

Neither militarily nor ideologically nor morally can one part of humanity afford to write off any other. If it was true in the time of Abraham Lincoln that no nation could be half slave and half free, it is even more true today in this shrinking world that we cannot have a world that is half slave and half free.

—MINOO R. MASANI.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thurber to Hobson to Thurber

► I CANNOT BE NIGGARDLY enough to keep to myself the following letters by James Thurber. First, however, as background for them, two excerpts from my stand-in columns for *TRADE WINDS*:

The younger one, also without suggestion from me, embarked on voracious book-reading two summers ago. . . . He has just finished Hemingway's "Old Man" and his fifteenth (approximately) reading of "The Thirteen Clocks" by James Thurber. He liked the new Hemingway also, but says, Thurber is still the best. [SR Sept. 6.]

. . . Mary Welch Hemingway . . . has just turned into *Today's Woman* a 2,500-word piece which will start a new series to be called "The Man I Married." [There will be] ensuing articles by Mrs. James Thurber, Mrs. Mario Lanza, Mrs. Richard Rodgers, Mrs. Dale Carnegie, Mrs. Eddie Cantor, Mrs. Leonard Lyons, and the like."

Letter from James Thurber, dated September 17:

If you had ever met my wife, you would know that there isn't enough money on earth or wild horses in hell to get her to do a piece about me called "My Life with James Thurber," or whatever WOMAN'S DAY calls it. (I don't know about it in caps, but woman's day is done, you know.) A guy and a doll from *TIME* came up here two years ago and the guy says to Helen on the porch, "Would you care to evaluate your husband's work?" Her answer was simple and wonderful; she said, "No." I would never have married a woman who would write about me while I'm alive or when I'm dead. I am repelled by husband-evaluators. I am putting such a woman in a piece I am now writing and she'll make you sick. If I lived in Cuba, I probably wouldn't give a damn. Now you lift me out of that list of husbands in which you included me with a casual and calloused "and the like"! The like of that group of boys has never been known before.

Laura, you used to know me! Love and kisses just the same to you and your boys, especially the younger one. I think he is better than Hemingway, too.

As always,
Jim Thurber

To which I replied, in part:

I just called the editor of *Today's Woman*, and asked how the hell he could have included your wife's name in his story, inasmuch as (a) he sent me the story in a signed letter, and (b) I had taken the trouble to phone him long-distance, at *The Saturday Review's* expense, to read back the item word for word, to check its accuracy. [He said that] an intermediary had led him to believe an article by Helen Thurber was actually forthcoming. . . . Anyway, all apologies to you, to Helen, to West Cornwall, and anybody else listening.

I then offered public retraction, asked whether I could quote parts of his letter



"I'm not sleepy."

in. same, and offered to send him whatever I wrote for his approval, to avoid compounding of errors.

Letter from James Thurber, dated October 2:

I think it's probably too late now, but if you want to use any parts of that letter of mine, you can do it and you don't have to let me see anything in advance. I understand there actually is an "intermediary" who thought he could get Helen to write about me. He has met her several times and she is very sweet and gentle and courteous, and she has never fired at him at point blank range. Where do men get the idea they understand women, for God's sake?

I have been going through a thyroid thing or I would have got this off sooner. Once again my love and best wishes in the hope that we can sit around together sometime and wonder whatever became of Barrow Lyon, Bob Potter, and such of the others as are not dead. I have one or two scandalous facts, but they are about the dead ones.

As always,
Jim

After which I can only add the hope that *SR* readers will be as delighted as I was that I committed my error and earned Mr. Thurber's scolding.

LAURA Z. HOBSON.

New York, N. Y.

Billy the Kid

► THE PUBLICITY given "Billy the Kid: Faust in America" [SR Oct. 11] is received with delight. I wish to lament, however, an unfortunate comparison with Faust. I live here in Lincoln County among people whose fathers and grandfathers are a part of the legend of Billy

the Kid. There are some who will defend him staunchly against attack. William H. Bonney couldn't have bargained with the devil, in their eyes, for life had taught him to trust no man. He is certainly not regarded merely as a juvenile delinquent gone trigger happy, either.

Since Billy the Kid has been relegated to legend, his memory deserves something more than a Faustian treatment, regardless of the undying fame of Faust. I do grant these comparisons with the hero of the early versions: Billy did possess magic with the six-shooter. He did know the alchemy of dust, sweat, and the hot sun of the desert wastes. He could enchant the Spanish señoritas who danced with him or sat with him under the New Mexico moon. Astrology was no mystery to him for he often contemplated the stars, desperate and alone. He could efficiently doctor a wound inflicted by a knife or gun.

Billy the Kid lived at a time when a man could not take the decency of his fellows for granted. He lived at a time when it was the right of a man to back up his ideas with a gun. And it happened that Billy had the idea that the murderers of Tunstall, the only living friend he had, were rats. He dedicated himself to the task of ridding the world of them, so the twenty-one notches on his gun were not all mere coincidence.

RUBY R. DOUGLASS.

Hondo, N.M.

Barefoot Boy

► MARSHALL FISHWICK swings too wide a loop and gets kinks in it, in his piece on Billy the Kid, when he states that the Kid "died with his boots on and guns blazing" after the "brave Irishman" Pat Garrett "hid in a dark room and ambushed