

# The Red Lodestar



**"The Opium of the Intellectuals,"** by Raymond Aron (Doubleday, 324 pp. \$5), is a French philosopher-sociologist's analysis of the hold that Marxist ideology has for literary people. Sidney Hook, professor of philosophy at New York University, reviews it.

By SIDNEY HOOK

IDEAS alone do not make or explain history. To the extent, however, that history is the result of activity consciously undertaken, few great events can be understood without reference to the ideas and ideals which have inspired them. Some vulgar followers of Marx have assumed that because ideas are effects they cannot ever themselves become decisive causes. But this assumption has been called into question by an historical event which is universally regarded as among the most significant in the twentieth century—the Russian Revolution of October 1917. It is not hard to show that the Revolution and the social system it produced by political action in this economically underdeveloped country were far more a result of the idea-system of the Bolsheviks, especially their interpretations and their misinterpretations of Marx, than of the alleged needs of the mode of economic production.

Raymond Aron, the distinguished French sociologist, does not believe that ideologies are all-important in human affairs. Neither does he believe they are negligible. The heretical beliefs of one generation of opinion-makers, the writers, critics, and teachers, may become the orthodoxies of the next generation, if not at home then abroad. Convinced that the ideology of Communism in its varied and nebulous forms has been, and still is, a powerful force among the intellectuals of France and certain Asian countries like Japan and India, Mr. Aron in "The Opium of the Intellectuals" submits its key assumptions to a devastating critique.

Marx referred to religion as "the opium of the people" at a time when the connotation of the term "opium" and of the "use" of opium was somewhat different from the present. Simone Weil, interpreting Marxism as a secular religion, charged that it itself was an opiate of the people. More

accurately, since no people has ever been persuaded of Marxism, M. Aron contends that it is the opium of the "intellectuals." By the "intellectuals" he means primarily the highly articulate group of French men of letters, of whom Jean-Paul Sartre is the most representative figure, whose influence extends to many countries in Europe and Asia.

Secondarily, the author is referring to that section of the literate public anywhere which regards the purely material achievements of the Soviet Union as more significant to mankind than its cost in human suffering and freedom. By Marxism he means those interpretations of Marx's ideas advanced by intellectuals who have first become sympathetic to Communism as a political and social system and then sought a justification for their commitment in some Marxist ideological construction. He regards their ideology as an opiate not because it leads to passivity but because it plunges their minds into a hopeless and dangerous confusion. One generic form of this confusion is to excuse, and often condone, endemic wholesale terror in the Communist empire. When they hear, say, of the

political kidnapping of children, they want to know before they utter judgment *whose* children they are, of *what* class and side. What they relentlessly and properly criticize from a humanistic point of view in their own milieu they magnanimously forgive as part of the logic of History or the cost of Progress beyond the Iron Curtain.

Aron's polemic is not directed against the Communist Party functionary or rank-and-filer who has openly enrolled as an enemy against the free world and is prepared to run risks for his convictions. It is those whom he calls *communisants* who are the targets of his analysis, the fellow-traveling sympathizers without a sense of proportion or justice. They are the critics who continually compare the existing institutions of their country with an abstract ideal of perfection but not with the realities of yesterday or the practices existing elsewhere. Their vocation as intellectuals justifies them in exercising their inalienable right, recognized by our free culture, to dissent from its ideals and practices. But they betray this vocation when they do so in the interest of a totalitarian system which would destroy the very possibility of dissent.

In the course of his discussion of the thought ways of the French *communisants* Aron explodes the political myths in terms of which they rationalize their asymmetrical moralism. The first is "the myth of the Left." Developing a view already made familiar by Arthur Koestler, Aron shows

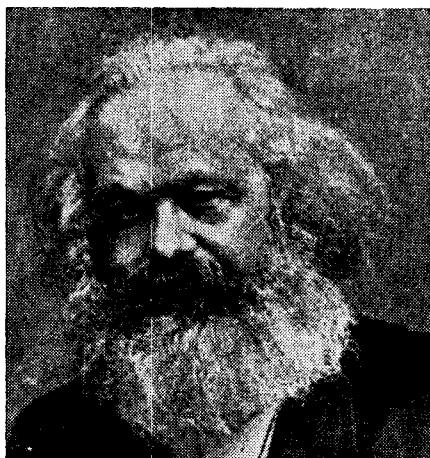
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**THE AUTHOR:** At fifty-two, Raymond Aron is one of France's most industrious and influential laborers in the world of ideas. A small, almost frail man, his working schedule would faze a less energetic intellectual. Half a million Frenchmen read the two columns he writes each day for the powerful *Le Figaro*. Students crowd the classrooms of the Institute d'Etudes Politiques where he lectures, while thousands of others tune in on his frequent radio talks on current political events. Yet Aron recognizes that his influence is confined to France (although his articles are published in foreign magazines) and is largely among its intellectuals. "They are the *enfants chéris* of France," he says, "and yet they have no influence. I say in all seriousness that the dearest desire of our novelists and intellectuals is to become ministers and the dearest desire of our ministers is to become novelists and intellectuals." Although neither a minister nor a novelist, Aron has on occasion served as adviser to heads of state. When his series of articles advocating a more stable system of government for France appeared in *Le Figaro*, the President and the head of the Assembly called in Aron to amplify his suggestions. His role as an active intellectual is a relatively recent one. Before World War II his life was more quiet and professorial. A lawyer's son, he left his native Paris to study and teach philosophy at the University of Cologne in the early Thirties. When Hitler took over Germany Aron moved to Le Havre, where he replaced Sartre as philosophy professor at the lycée. In World War II he joined de Gaulle in London as editor of *La France Libre*. By the war's end he was deep in journalism, becoming a columnist for the daily *Combat*. From there it was but a short step to *Le Figaro*. Today he lives with his wife and two children in the fashionable Passy section, like many another French intellectual he likes to muse while strolling along the quais. But his musing and strolling hours grow less frequent. Along with his journalistic and lecturing chores, he's now deep in a three-volume work on the sociological aspects of war.

—ROLLENE WATERMAN.



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—Erich Hartmann.

Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, Arthur Koestler—"myths are reinforced by the idolatry of history."

that although the antithesis between Left and Right has become largely meaningless, the French intellectual would rather be Left than right. This myth of the Left is associated with "the myth of the Revolution" which exalts the notion of sudden, total, and even violent change as if it were always desirable, as if its glory always justified its cost and made it preferable to the prosiness of gradual reform. The very word "Revolution," says Aron, has a semantic fascination for French intellectuals whether they are Christian, Socialist, Gaullist, Communist, or Existentialist. Everyone talks Revolution, few understand what they really mean by it, no one even dreams of making it. By a curious verbal transference every avant-garde movement in every field which claims to be "revolutionary" adds to the prestige of the concept which is exploited most skilfully by the Communists, who are really the deadliest enemies of nonconformism.

**T**HE third myth which bedevils the French intellectual is "the myth of the proletariat." In Marx's writings the proletariat signifies the skilled industrial workers. Because of their strategic role and position in society, Marx regarded them as the most reliable base of the social movement. Developments in Western economy since Marx wrote, and partly because of the very influence of Marx on social legislation and trade-union organization, have made the assumption that the proletariat is necessarily revolutionary or even unified in its aims quite dubious. Many French intellectuals blissfully unconcerned about changes in the economic structure of society glorify the proletariat not only as the keeper of the sacred revolutionary flame but as the repository of all the virtues of humanity. What is even worse, they then proceed as in the case of Sartre, to identify the inter-

ests of this ideal but unreal proletariat with the interests of the very real but far from ideal Communist Party. To criticize the latter, despite its imperfections and crimes, is really to criticize the proletariat and ultimately to become, in the words of Sartre, "the enemy of mankind and oneself." The rationalism of the Enlightenment thus becomes transformed by the Left into a kind of servile Byzantinism whose Pope in the Kremlin, although admittedly fallible, is beyond radical political criticism.

These myths are reinforced by the fetishism or idolatry of history and the illusion of historical necessity which, despite the assumptions of their own metaphysics, have led the leading French Existentialists to equate opposition, especially a defeated opposition, with treason to mankind irrespective of such trivial matters as evidence of legal and moral innocence. This entire complex of ideas has generated an unlimited credulity about a classless and stateless society which in Hegelian fashion makes its way to higher levels by using imperfect human instruments. In this way the *communisants* can shrug off the multiple evidence of Communist terror and cruelty, whether of the total Stalinist variety or of the paler Khrushchev type, without any sense of guilt or complicity. The tyrants and executioners are carrying out the inevitable laws of history. This extenuation of their work in advance naturally does not make things more difficult for them.

As a Frenchman, Aron can say things about French intellectuals that an American would hardly be forgiven for saying no matter how true. He makes short shrift of Sartre, whom he convicts of writing about America and Americans in the same style and logic as Goebbels employed against the Jews. (Since Budapest, Sartre has regurgitated some of his apologies for

the Communist cause. It is still uncertain, however, whether he will not prepare another dialectical dish for the edification of those whose stomachs, still accustomed to the Kremlin's political diet, are too weak for the crudities of the French Communist Party.) He exposes the simplistic thinking of Merleau-Ponty, whose macabre book "Humanisme et Terreur" argues in effect that any basic criticism of the Kremlin is impermissible: such criticism at best betrays lack of faith in history and humanity, at worst it is a provocation to war. Therefore, whatever the evidence one must accept the verdict of the Moscow Trials! What seems especially revolting to Aron is the spectacle of Christian-Communists or "progressive Christians" like those connected at one time with the magazine *Esprit*, who gloss over the infamies of Communism as if they were nothing but the deserved consequences of the iniquities of the free world, and who are prepared to support the general line of the Communist Party if only it could see its way clear to make some slight concessions to the Church. Aron quotes some shocking passages from the writings of those "progressive Christians" who were "worker-priests" in which condemnation of the Marshall Plan, Social Democracy, "the narcotic of religion," and praise for the Communist Party as "the guide of the proletariat" are mixed up, in about the same proportion of ingredients as found in a *Pravda* editorial, but served up with a pious sauce.

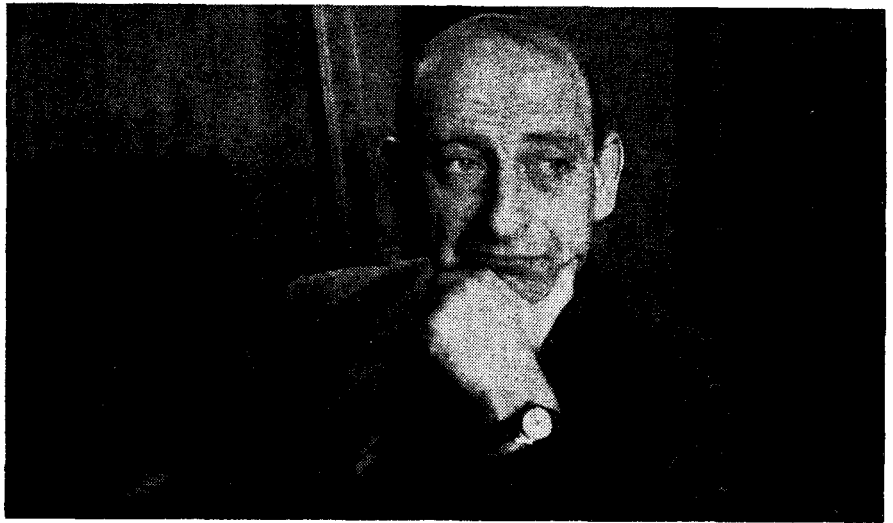
M. Aron tries to explain the influence of these sophisticated yet silly people in terms of French cultural traditions. France gives weight to the judgment of men of letters on any subject on which they choose to deliver themselves independently of their lack of special, intellectual qualifications or even elementary informa-



tion. I am not convinced that this explains the phenomenon of the recent and current political influence of the *communisants*. For it is obvious that the French public is less likely to give ear to them when they sing the virtues of Communism than when they damn American democracy. Nor am I convinced that he answers adequately the question why those who live in France, "the intellectuals' paradise," should seek to destroy it and their own vocation as well. "Why do so many intellectuals," he asks, "take exception to a society which provides them with honorable standards of living (considering the collective resources of the country), puts no impediments in their way, and proclaims that the works of the mind represent the supreme value?" I am inclined to agree with him that economic reasons enter only peripherally. But I am doubtful of his own view that the intellectuals' hostility is to be explained by their sense of exclusion from the political controls of French life or their sense of preaching in the wilderness or being defrauded of their due. For there is little evidence that they actually desire political responsibility, or would be denied it if they worked through existing political organizations. And there is considerable evidence provided by Aron himself that they enjoy a prestige and influence and moral status, despite their cruel and callous indifference to the sufferings of the victims of History, not likely to be equaled in any Communist society. The subject requires further exploration but Raymond Aron's study is an indispensable starting point.

This book is full of illuminating insights. Although criticized sometimes as a man of the Right, Aron shows the absurdity of that characterization if it suggests standpattism or unintelligent conservatism. He is an illusioned liberal sensitive to the plurality of factors in history, undogmatic and free of fanaticism. Prepared to engage himself in behalf of the cause of freedom, he does not, like Sartre and others, excommunicate from the human race those who contend against him. In places he seems to be a bit doctrinaire about the possibility of planning in a democratic society, and his assertion that "every impulse towards global planning is doomed to end in tyranny" smacks a bit of the a priorism which he so justly condemns in other French intellectuals. One does not have to plan everything. English and American life as well as certain international agencies show a kind of planning—certainly more than an impulse—that does not threaten freedom but provides a firmer base for it.

## Aron on the Intellectuals



• "ENGLISH writers of the avant-garde, whose names are probably unknown in the House of Commons, are overcome with rapture when they come to Paris and settle down in Saint Germain-des-Près. They at once develop a passionate interest in politics, a subject the dispiriting sobriety of which at home discourages their attention. And indeed the discussions they will hear in Paris are elaborated with a subtlety that cannot but enthrall those who live by the mind. The last article of Jean-Paul Sartre is a political event, or at least it is greeted as such by a circle of people which, though narrow, is convinced of its own importance. The political ambitions of successful French novelists collide with the literary ambitions of successful French statesmen, who dream of writing novels just as others dream of becoming Ministers.

"It will be said that this impression is a superficial one, that this paradise is reserved for the tourist trade. There are few intellectuals who manage to live by their pens. Schoolteachers and university professors have to make do on their meager salaries, scientists work in ill-equipped laboratories. One may speculate on the case of an intellectual, rich in glory and in royalties, who nevertheless places his pen at the service of an ill-defined revolution, but one forgets all those who are embittered by the contrast between the profits (undeclared) of businessmen, shopkeepers, surgeons, and lawyers and the modesty of their own condition."

• "The man in the street is all too disposed to resentment against the too-powerful ally, all too prone to the bitterness from national weakness, to nostalgia for past glory and hope for a different and better future. But the intellectuals ought to restrain these popular emotions, ought to show the inescapable reasons for permanent solidarity and interdependence. Instead of fulfilling the role of guides, they prefer, especially in France, to betray their mission, to encourage the ignorant feelings of the masses by adducing hypocritical justifications for them. In fact their quarrel with the United States is a way of rationalizing their own guilt.

"In most countries the intellectuals are even more anti-American than the man in the street. Some of the outbursts of Sartre at the time of the Korean war or the Rosenberg case recall those of the Nazis against the Jews. The United States is represented as the embodiment of everything most detested."

• "The Soviet Union purges and subjugates the intellectuals, but at least it takes them seriously. It was intellectuals who gave to the Soviet regime the grandiose and equivocal doctrine out of which the bureaucrats have developed a state religion. Even today, when discussing class conflicts or the relations of production, they savor at once the joys of theological argument, the austere satisfactions of scientific controversy, and the ecstatic thrill of mediation on universal history. The analysis of the American reality will never provide pleasures as rare as these. The United States does not persecute its intellectuals enough to enjoy in its turn the turbid attractions of terror; it gives a few of them, temporarily, a prestige and glory which can compete with that of the film stars or baseball players; but it leaves the majority in the shadows. Persecution is more bearable to the intelligentsia than indifference."

From "The Opium of the Intellectuals," by Raymond Aron (Doubleday).

**DOGMA OF THE CENTURY:** Alfred G. Meyer's "Leninism" (Harvard University Press, \$5.50) is an excellently documented, thoughtfully conceived, beautifully written, and keenly stimulating analysis of the ideology that has rocked the twentieth century. Dr. Meyer believes that early in his career Lenin labored to impose a bureaucratic organization upon the revolutionary movement and then later compiled the results of his years of study of this world in flux into a reintegration of Marxism as a vital, dynamic doctrine. All too frequently Western statesmen are happy to shrug off Leninism as an ideology of expediency, unworthy in a scholarly sense of serious attention. Dr. Meyer does not share this viewpoint, because, as he points out, "unconsciously, or consciously, every Communist leader looks back to Lenin for guidance in solving his problems and understanding the world. Their image of the outside world, their approach to the solution of problems—everything they see and everything they do is couched in the imagery of Lenin's ideas." Far too often Leninism, which "combines bold, new visions with stubborn, old-fashioned nonsense," is examined not as a doctrine but as a source of irritation. "Why should people become Leninists?" is unfortunately a more critical question than "What is Leninism?" Dr. Meyer addresses himself only to the latter question, and this is proper. He does not feel that a knowledge of nineteenth-century Russian social thought is an "essential precondition" to understanding Leninism, and many students of Russian history would probably disagree. Still, even this failing does not detract from the over-all value of the work.

—MARVIN L. KALB.

## CIVIL WAR

**A**S THE centennial years of the Civil War loom closer, authors and publishers are increasing their efforts to record every episode and aspect of the conflict that occupies a larger place in the national consciousness than any segment of our past. Between them, they may eventually kill off interest in the Civil War for years to come. Too many books based on too little research and concerned with relatively minor themes are flooding the market. While new information of significant nature about any historical period is always welcome, our existing knowledge of the Civil War is impressively vast. Except for a few areas of the war, we do not need continued investigation. What we require are mature efforts to analyze the voluminous materials available and to interpret them in terms of American history as a whole. —T. HARRY WILLIAMS.

## Untouched by Better Angels

**"This Was Andersonville," by John McElroy, edited by Roy Meredith** (McDowell, Obolensky. 355 pp. \$12.50), is a collection of articles about the infamous Civil War prison written by a man who was an inmate. Earl Schenck Miers, who reviews it, is the author of "Gettysburg" and other books.

By Earl Schenck Miers

**T**O FIND an example comparable to Andersonville for the horror and degradation that a war produces, one must turn to World War II and the prison camps of Belsen and Dachau or the Death March in the Philippines. MacKinlay Kantor's now classic novel gave the American public a pretty strong dose of Andersonville two years ago, but those who feel they would like another and equally strong dose of how, in America, man's inhu-

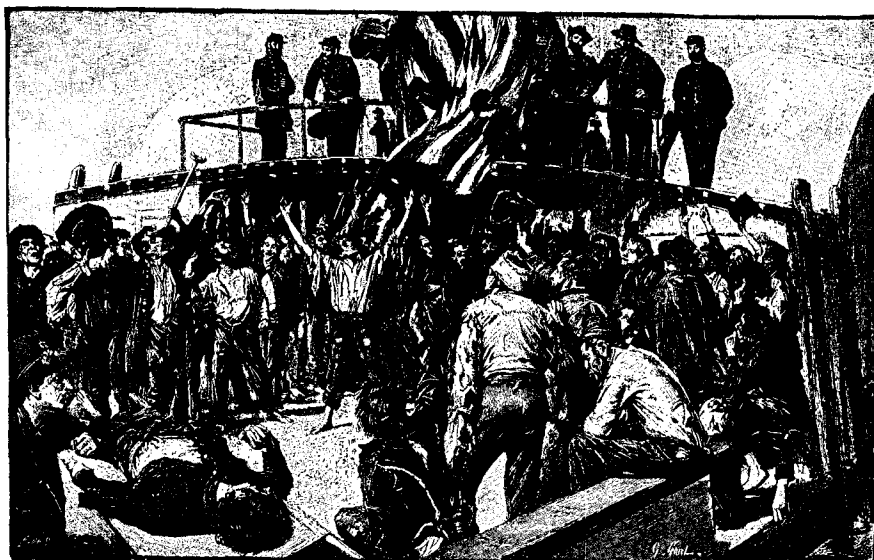
manity to man can operate, will not be disappointed by John McElroy's memoirs, now published as "This Was Andersonville" and edited by Roy Meredith.

With passion, bitterness, and considerable skill as a war reporter, McElroy set himself to tasks that were not in the mind of MacKinlay Kantor. McElroy hated the South and its people; Jefferson Davis, Alexander Hamilton Stephens, Howell Cobb, and the other chief functionaries of the Confederate government were to him war criminals of the sorriest kind; his book must be judged against this bias.

Right at the start, in fairness to the Confederacy, certain basic truths should be stated. The Confederacy did not invent prison camps. The Union ran an open prison stockade at Elmira, N. Y., to cite one example, that, in Lincoln's phrase, was not touched "by the better angels of our spirit." As far as such statistics ever can be official, fifteen out of every hundred Federal soldiers died in Southern prisons, and twelve out of every hundred Rebel soldiers died in Northern stockades. In short, both North and South were playing in the major leagues.

But Andersonville was the worst. With its Dead Line, its unnecessary and brutal overcrowding, its sadistic and ruthless prison keepers like Winder and Wirz, its food shortages that at least were understandable, Andersonville gave the horror of the Civil War a new dimension. If this was whither slavery and secession (and only the strange, legalistic mind of a Jefferson Davis could conceive of one without the other) led in defeat, then it was as well that the Confederacy didn't triumph. For Andersonville was the symbol of the collapse of a legal argument that the war was supposed to settle in a single stroke.

McElroy, as violently opposed to the idea behind secession as any man who ever lived, recalls his experiences at



—"This Was Andersonville."

"Exchanged Prisoners from Andersonville Cheering the Colors."