

A WORD TO OUR READERS

The purpose of this new magazine is suggested by its name: to dissent from the bleak atmosphere of conformism that pervades the political and intellectual life of the United States; to dissent from the support of the *status quo* now so noticeable on the part of many former radicals and socialists; to dissent from the terrible assumption that a new war is necessary or inevitable, and that the only way to defeat Stalinism is through atomic world suicide.

The accent of DISSENT will be radical. Its tradition will be the tradition of democratic socialism. We shall try to reassert the libertarian values of the socialist ideal, and at the same time, to discuss freely and honestly what in the socialist tradition remains alive and what needs to be discarded or modified.

DISSENT is not and does not propose to become a political party or group. On the contrary, its existence is based on an awareness that in America today there is no significant socialist movement and that, in all likelihood, no such movement will appear in the immediate future. The editors and supporters of DISSENT are independent radicals bound together by common values and ideas, who are eager to assert those values and ideas, as well as to discuss freely their differences and problems.

DISSENT will attempt to:

- provide fresh and lively critical opinion on the issues of the day.
- bring together intellectual sentiment against the blight of conformism.
- defend democratic, humanist and radical values.
- attack all forms of totalitarianism, whether fascist or Stalinist.
- engage in a frank and friendly dialogue with liberal opinion.
- publish studies of American cultural life.
- encourage scholarly contributions in political and social thought.
- discuss and reevaluate socialist doctrines.

DISSENT will not have any editorial position or statements. Each writer will speak for himself. Our magazine will be open to a wide arc of opinion, excluding only Stalinists and totalitarian fellow-travellers on the

one hand, and those former radicals who have signed their peace with society as it is, on the other. We shall welcome any expression of lively and competent thought, or scholarly contributions touching upon our area of interest, even if these dissent from DISSENT.

But DISSENT would be meaningless if in dissenting it did not also affirm. We are united in the affirmation of a positive belief—the belief in socialism. Not the “socialism” of any splinter or faction or party, but rather the ethos and the faith in humanity that for more than 100 years have made men “socialists.” We share a belief in the dignity of the individual, we share a refusal to countenance one man’s gain at the expense of his brother, and we share an intellectual conviction that man can substantially control his condition if he understands it and wills to.

DISSENT is being published by a group of independent radicals who have raised the funds necessary to insure the honoring of the subscriptions we solicit. At a meeting held recently, fifty friends of the magazine discussed plans, elected an editorial board and a larger supervisory committee. Different emphases of opinion were heard at this conference, yet all agreed that the voice of DISSENT should be heard.

Without further ado, we present our first issue. It does not fulfill all of our hopes and aspirations—no first issue could. We particularly hope that in later issues there will be more articles of a discussion nature. But we think that this first issue provides a warrant of our seriousness and an indication of our purpose.

If you would like to see such a magazine thrive in America, you can join the friends of DISSENT in obtaining subscriptions from your friends, in contributing the funds—and the articles—required for its sustenance, and in spreading the word that there is a free voice of DISSENT.

THE EDITORS

Does It Hurt When You Laugh?

The confusion of modern politics runs so deep, the breakdown of those traditional responses which held together a more or less “enlightened” public is so complete, that one no longer knows what feeling an event is likely to evoke among people of some political sophistication, *particularly* among people of political sophistication. For example. The American Committee for Cultural Freedom recently held a conference in New York on European-American relations, at which a large number of distinguished intellectuals tried to find out why Europe doesn’t love us. A few days earlier there had appeared in the *New York Times* a chapter of

Winston Churchill's memoirs which bluntly described how he and Stalin had carved up Eastern Europe. Did any of the intellectuals in New York think to make a connection between their "problem" and Churchill's revelation? Did any of them suggest that one reason for the deep-seated "neutralist" feeling on the continent may be a resentment against precisely the kind of fact that Churchill revealed?

Or take the problem of civil liberties. Last summer the New School for Social Research decided to hang a yellow curtain over an Orozco mural in its cafeteria, because the mural included portraits of Lenin and Stalin. The mural, explained Dr. Hans Simons, president of the school, "does not express the philosophy of the faculty." (Did it "express" that philosophy when it was first unveiled?) In reply to protests, Dr. Simons said that the mural was "a problem of the school" and did not concern "the outside." One is not shocked at this, the language is familiar enough, go a step further and you have the American Legion or the DAR telling one to *go back where you came from*. But wait: the philistine reference to "the outside" comes not from the American Legion but from the New School, the New School which began as a refuge for liberalism and freedom. Well, Dr. Simons, one is sorry to say this, but the mural is not merely "a problem of the school"; and one would be delighted to go back where one came from: New York.

Or consider the clash between the state of Indiana and Robin Hood. A member of the State Textbook Commission had demanded an investigation to see whether the Robin Hood story spreads Communistic propaganda, since, as everyone knows, Robin robbed the rich to help the poor. Ordinarily this would be great fun, a prime example of nativist ignorance; but can one, should one laugh today? Is it really funny? Doesn't it take place in an atmosphere where little idiocies quickly lead to big disasters? (To be sure, there are some quarters that don't feel worried at all, that seem to imply, in fact, that there is no need for concern until Sidney Hook is accused of robbing the rich to help the poor.)

The liberals are bewildered. The group around *The Nation* cries wolf day and night, never troubling to make elementary distinctions between native know-nothingism and full-fledged fascism. Yet, it is sad to say, *The Nation* provides more necessary information about violations of civil liberties than any comparable American journal. That it uses this necessary information to further the disastrous position of quasi-appeasement of Stalinism, merely emphasizes all the more the failure of the other, more powerful wing of liberalism to do its job. I refer, of course, to those sophisticated liberals who read *Commentary* and think of Sidney Hook as their intellectual spokesman.

Now I do not mean to say that Sidney Hook is indifferent to the problem of civil liberties, or that he is "against" them. What is far more im-

portant is that the commitments at the deepest levels of feeling, the responses that really and evidently *matter*, are not, for people like Hook and the political writers for *Commentary*, aroused by the problem of civil liberties. Were one to read only a journal like *Commentary* today, one would hardly be aware that there is a serious threat to civil liberties in America, though one would certainly know that certain Stalinoids are inflating and exploiting this threat for their own purposes.

TAKE ANOTHER EXAMPLE. For six years now a conspicuously powerless group called the Independent Socialist League, in political complexion Marxist and premature anti-Stalinist, has been on the Attorney General's "Subversive List." This disgraceful amalgam with Stalinist organizations has done the members of the ISL considerable harm. Yet hardly a voice has been raised in the official circles of liberalism to fight against this injustice. For what does it matter? Everyone knows that in difficult times minor injustices are unavoidable, and besides it is such an insignificant group. . . .

Now, finally, the Attorney General has filed a "bill of particulars" against the ISL. The group is not even accused of favoring "the violent overthrow" of the government; in substance and apart from the gross ignorance of the Attorney General's charges, the ISL is accused of nothing more than being Marxist and desiring the abolition of capitalism. This, the Attorney General implies, is enough to make it "subversive." Does anyone—except to his honor, Norman Thomas—speak up? Would Sidney Hook trouble to mention this case in one of his innumerable articles in the *Sunday Times*? Are you likely to find such things if you read a score of *Commentaries*?

That the liberals have changed or modified their ideas is not important; so has everyone of any intelligence. That they have lost their capacity for integral response, not all but all too many, is important. How easy it is to attack and destroy "the ritual liberals," those, that is, who favor unconditional civil liberties without regard to the Stalinist problem! How easy it is to offer the "sophisticated" notion that Stalinists have no claim upon civil liberties because they are intent upon destroying them . . . but what if someone asks: should the McCarthyites be deprived of *their* civil liberties because they too are intent upon destroying them?

We do not live in "a reign of terror," and when Bertrand Russell carelessly says that we do he plays into the hands of those with a stake in consistently underestimating the danger to our freedoms. But surely the borders of the mind are contracting in America, not through physical terror or force but through built-in fears, through hesitations and cautions which are not without a genuine basis in reality. And what is most disheartening is not

that the reactionaries attack but that the liberals hardly remember how to counter-attack.

Well, here may be one answer to the questions that readers are likely to ask of *DISSENT*: what is your purpose? What do you think radicals can do in America today? What follows is hardly a full or sufficient answer but it is not at all insignificant. American radicals can do at least this much: together with those liberals who have not become, in the phrase of C. Wright Mills, "crackpot realists," we can try to raise the traditional banner of personal freedom that is now slipping from the hands of so many accredited spokesmen of liberalism.

I.H.

Imperialism and the Quest for New Ideas

Political thinking, like merchandising, has its fashions. As Detroit car producers feel that to sell cars new models must be introduced each year, so political theorists have lately felt that to understand the world and sell one's ideas there must be a regular renewal of theoretical equipment. What retooling is to Detroit, the clamor for "new ideas" is to the higher political thinkers though in both cases there is generally a change in the trimmings, not the chassis.

It is indeed impossible to understand genuinely new problems with antiquated theoretical equipment. The sad fact is, however, that many of the old problems still remain with us. If only we could get rid of *them*, how happy one would be to discard the theoretical categories pertinent to their analysis.

Take the concept of imperialism. Most liberals profess to believe that one can speak only of imperialism when referring to the bad old days; the term elicits for them an image of the marines landing in a Banana Republic or British troops lording it in India. One detects a kind of word magic in the writings of such liberals: banish the word and thereby abolish the thing.

How refreshing, by contrast is the cynical frankness of a genuine imperialist like Winston Churchill who, in his recently published memoirs, tells of a conference with Stalin in Moscow in 1944, the very year that saw the high point of propaganda about the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter and all that. Writes Churchill:

The moment was apt for business, so I said "Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. We have interests, missions, and agents there. Don't let us get at cross-purposes in small ways. So far as Britain and

Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety per cent predominance in Roumania, for us to have ninety per cent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?" While this was being translated I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper:

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Roumania | |
| Russia | 90% |
| The others | 10% |
| Greece | |
| Great Britain | 90% |
| (in accord with U.S.A.) | |
| Russia | 10% |
| Yugoslavia | 50-50% |
| Hungary | 50-50% |
| Bulgaria | |
| Russia | 75% |
| The others | 25% |

I pushed this across to Stalin who had by then heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down.

Churchill wrote on a piece of paper; Stalin made a tick; and that sealed the fate of millions. The heads of two of the three most powerful nations in the world—with the full knowledge and consent of the head of the third—disposed of the lives of subject peoples in roughly the same manner that a generation earlier the heads of the then most powerful imperialist powers carved out and distributed among themselves the African continent. There are, no doubt, a number of important theoretical differences between the structure of imperialism then and imperialism now, but it remains true that superpowers carve up the world and distribute zones of influence the way game wardens delimit hunting areas.

That, to be sure, was in the era of the Four Freedoms. But what about today, when the Free World is engaged in a moral crusade to deliver from slavery those whom it sold to Stalin only a few years ago? America now establishes bases and spheres of influence throughout the world, from Franco's Spain to Greenland, from Japan to South America. When there are elections in Italy everyone knows that the real contenders are not Togliatti and de Gasperi but Stalin and Truman. When even rightist French politicians begin to discuss the advisability of calling off their colonial war in Indo-China they are sternly reminded by Dulles and Nixon that since America now pays more than half the cost it is only to be expected that every Frenchman will do his duty. When the Italian premier Pella hesitates to push the claims of Italy with regard to Trieste he is egged on by Mrs. Luce, the U. S. Ambassador, and told that he had better get into the fight.

Meanwhile Russia deports Kalmuks and Rumanians, Hungarian Jews and Volga Germans, liquidates Czech ministers and Hungarian policemen, exploits Polish coal mines and Rumanian oil fields, starves Bulgarian peasants and Manchurian coolies, in the name, of course, of national self-determination.

Does all this constitute imperialism? Every liberal and ex-radical who knows that Marxism is obsolete suddenly remembers that Lenin and Hilferding declared imperialism to be characterized by the export of capital, whereas the United States lends money to and subsidizes the nations it dominates. And of course, there could not be any other kind of imperialism. . . .

Word magic resigns supreme: Two superpowers direct the destinies of the people of the world; they shore up crumbling regimes in Asia and Europe and South America; they do not hesitate to send battleships to remove legally established governments; they do not hesitate to institute terror against nationalist movements. But does this constitute imperialism?

Every liberal knows that Lenin and Hilferding. . . .

And since there is no imperialism, there is no need to speak out in defense of national groupings. Every conceivable solution is suggested for Trieste except the simple and elementary one of allowing the people of that city to decide, by popular vote, their own destiny.

THE LEAST A RADICAL CAN DO in these years of the locusts is to try not to be a dupe. We may be unable to affect the course of history, but we can still control our thinking; we should at least avoid the double-talk and word-magic that is so popular today. When Mr. Dulles attempts to influence the outcome of the German elections or when Mr. Nixon warns the Indonesians against "premature" independence, it is inexcusable to deny that these acts constitute imperialist intervention in the affairs of other nations. There may be and are all sorts of disagreements among socialists as to what policies to adopt with regard to the current world situation; but there should be no disagreement as to the need for calling things by their right names.

L.C.