

Arnold S. Kaufman

## ***A Call to Radicalism***

# **WHERE SHALL LIBERALS GO?**

*Many religious exercises are entered into with seeming fervour, where the heart, at the time, feels cold and languid: A habit of dissimulation is by degrees contracted: And fraud and falsehood become the predominant principle.*

—DAVID HUME

*If he is to think politically in a realistic way, the intellectual must constantly know his own social position. This is necessary in order that he may be aware of the sphere of strategy that is really open to his influence. If he forgets this, his thinking may exceed his sphere of strategy so far as to make impossible any translation of his thought into action, his own or that of others. His thought may become fantastic. If he remembers his powerlessness too well, assumes that his sphere of strategy is restricted to the point of impotence, then his thought may easily become politically trivial. In either case, fantasy and powerlessness may well be the lot of his mind.*

—C. WRIGHT MILLS

### CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Introduction .....   | 556 |
| I. The Heart of Liberalism .....                           | 558 |
| II. The Need for a Turn Toward Radicalism .....            | 563 |
| III. The Politics of Pseudo-Realism .....                  | 574 |
| IV. The Politics of Self-Indulgence .....                  | 586 |
| V. The Alternative: The Politics of Radical Pressure ..... | 593 |
| VI. American Liberalism and Foreign Policy .....           | 606 |

### **Introduction**

Seldom have American liberals been so feverishly divided about anything as they are today about the Administration's Vietnam policies. The rough consensus that liberals had arrived at on both domestic and foreign policy issues has been rudely shattered by the reverberations of this war.

It would be a mistake to suppose that this rift is an isolated case—an accident of shifting political events. Rather, the growing disagreement among liberals is a dramatic symptom of latent differences that have too long been obscured by consensus-making rhetoric. The previously dormant issues are fundamental. For they include questions about the nature and function of democracy, the nature and actual threat of Communism, and the political strategies that best serve liberal aims.

Liberals have been too preoccupied with their internal conflict, too shocked by its intensity, to have spent much time trying to articulate the bases of disagreement as clearly and comprehensively as the task deserves. The critics of American liberalism have, by contrast, been actively analyzing and attacking. Both Right and Left accuse liberals of being self-deluded, weak-willed, and pusillanimous. But where the Right maintains that liberal cowardice consists of being soft on Communism, the Left holds that its weakness consists in fearful deference to the metaphysicians of the Cold War. The Right views liberals as leading America down the road to serfdom; the Left as permitting America's fate to be determined by corporate elites whose exclusive concern is with protection of vested interests. Yet both criticisms fail, though not in equal measure, because neither set of critics is capable of seeing that the present crisis of American liberalism is due primarily to liberalism's failure properly to exploit its own traditional resources. For the liberal tradition possesses moral and intellectual resources richer than those of any competing tradition. The Right fails to acknowledge this because it rejects or distorts that tradition; the Left fails because, in its passion for a new revolutionary rhetoric, it blinds itself to the radical implications of liberalism's very old aims and principles.

Too many liberals respond to their critics by splitting the difference. They balance the "extremist radicalism" of the Right against the "extremist radicalism" of the Left, and congratulate themselves for displaying intelligence and moral acumen. But "extremism" is not a matter of radical policies. Extremism is essentially an abuse of the traditions of reason and civility.

Liberals themselves participate in extremist politics so conceived. Their participation is expressed in two deranged forms of political life

—the politics of pseudo-realism and the politics of self-indulgence. The former is rooted in the belief that political action in pursuit of goals that are not “possible” or “practical” is irrational. The latter, in the belief that political action that does not express to the full a person’s “authentic” moral feelings is insincere and immoral.

The concept of “realism” involved in the first is defective; the form of “authenticity” involved in the second is spurious. The politics of pseudo-realism cuts the nerve of action; the politics of self-indulgence impedes effective action. Though pseudo-realism grows out of cupidity, ambition, fear, prudence, a tendency to moral masochism, lack of compassion, and weariness, it is nourished by defective commitment to the traditions of reason. And though self-indulgence is promoted by passionate moral commitment, frustration, moral outrage, romantic exuberance, and generational mistrust, it too is nourished by defective commitment to the traditions of reason.

In this essay I will examine in detail both of these political styles. For an important burden of my argument is to show that the defects of contemporary American liberalism are due in the main to a breakdown in the institutions of reason. The analysis will proceed on the basis of caricature: idealized profiles that describe no individual perfectly. This method is justified on the grounds that these composite profiles do identify important and coherent tendencies that anyone familiar with the contemporary American political scene should have little difficulty in recognizing.

But the main burden of my argument is to show that liberalism’s survival as a vital force in American politics depends on a resolute turn towards radicalism. For if unreason is the main defect of those who practice the politics of self-indulgence, the serious moral concern and desire to live authentically that make them radical are conditions also of authentic liberalism.

The problem of specifying the political style that a radical-liberal ought to adopt cannot be resolved without sketching a theory of democracy. For political styles invariably presuppose views about the decision-making processes of a society. The two deranged forms of political life, pseudo-realism and self-indulgence, are intimately related to defective conceptions of democracy. Hence, the other major burden of my argument is to elaborate and defend a conception of democracy that provides a theoretical basis for the form of political life radical-liberals should adopt.

In the sections that follow, I first state what lies at the heart of liberal doctrine. I then argue that the conditions in this country are

such that no one can be authentically liberal unless he is radical. The analysis and criticism of the politics of pseudo-liberalism and self-indulgence that follow lead to a statement of the theory of democracy and of the political strategy radical-liberals ought to embrace. In the final section I apply the results of all that has gone before to the problems of foreign policy because these are the problems that most agitate liberals today and most fully expose to public view the deepening rift within our ranks.

### ***1. The Heart of Liberalism***

Liberalism is a political theory, and therefore provides a guide to the making of public policy. All liberals share the belief that the ultimate aim of public policy is the protection and promotion of each person's equal opportunity to develop his potentialities as fully as possible. The limits of possibility for the individual are partly set by unalterable biological, physical and social circumstances. But additional moral limits are set by the constraints of civility—those traits of character that make possible stability, mutual trust, collective regard for human welfare, and justice in the organization of society.

These convictions, though basic, are not distinctive to liberalism. A Marxist who is also a humanist could accept them. A liberal and such a Marxist would, however, normally disagree in two fundamental ways.

Marxists have always tended to be more optimistic than liberals about the possibility of transforming the social order in ways that will eliminate the need for organized reliance on instruments of force and violence. Expressed in the doctrine of "the withering away of the state," Marxists have traditionally tended to accept the view that neither self-regarding nor anti-social traits are indelibly etched in human beings. They have supposed that these traits can be erased by the right sort of social environment. Whether crossed by Hobbes, Freud, Niebuhr, or Sartre, liberals typically range from cautious scepticism to outright pessimism about the prospect of achieving that final alteration in the human constitution necessary to transform man's earthly condition into a veritable heaven of warm-hearted relationships.

Nevertheless, disagreement in this respect is one of emphasis—and increasingly so. For responsible Marxists, especially those in countries where Communism has assumed power, are fast revising their views on this point. The evident need to deal with economic inefficiency by re-introducing competitive market mechanisms has compelled them to acknowledge, in practice at least, the psychological truth on which ad-

herence to the market mechanism has been traditionally based: that in any social situation normal persons are, to some extent, incorrigibly acquisitive.

The second disagreement is more definite and intractable than the first. Marxists believe that by eliminating what they call "the alienation of labor" all the other chronic ills of society that are remediable will also disappear. This *principle of the sufficiency of unalienated labor* requires the elimination of two conditions that, for the Marxist, constitute alienation of labor: the unjust distribution of the products of work and the stultifying character of the conditions of work.

Liberals may argue about how we are to understand "distributive justice," but otherwise they agree with the Marxist's moral assessment of the alienation of labor. Liberals do not, however, accept the principle of the sufficiency of unalienated labor. For they do not share the Marxist's belief that all the chronic and remediable ills of society will disappear once the alienation of labor has been ended. In particular, liberals are convinced that political democracy, by which they *at least* mean the right of any group to organize political opposition to existing power, is independent of alienation of labor, and just as basic to the realization of a good society. They believe that those who are opposed to existing institutional arrangements should normally have the fullest possible freedom to contest prevailing power by spreading alternative aims and programs before the public. Liberals concede that political democracy is not always desirable; for, as John Stuart Mill emphasized in *Representative Government*, there are cultural and economic prerequisites of formal democracy. But where these prerequisites do not exist, society should be so organized as to develop them as rapidly as possible. And this requires that a *liberal* case against complete freedom to speak, to publish, and to organize be established with absolute decisiveness before any departure from maximum freedom can be regarded as morally permissible. Liberals may no longer agree with Lord Acton's claim that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"; but they are convinced that even benevolent power is used manipulatively, and that absolute power tends to be used to manipulate absolutely. Increasingly it is manipulation rather than the naked exercise of power that poses the greatest threat to liberal institutions.

Here we come to the two ideals that most people regard as distinctive of liberalism: liberty and rational choice. Authentic liberalism implies that the cherished fulfillment of human potentialities can only be achieved through *self*-fulfillment. Moreover, formal liberty to live according to unreflective preference will not suffice. The choices must also

be made thoughtfully. In a brief sentence, liberals believe that *a good society is one in which each person possesses the resource of materials, mind and spirit, as well as the opportunities, to carve out a career in conformity to that person's own nature and reasoned choice.*

If a liberal is a utilitarian, he regards these resources and the freedom to utilize them as essential conditions of a satisfying life. But many liberals also regard freedom as intrinsically valuable, perhaps even divinely endowed with value. Metaphysical differences of this sort are philosophically but not politically important. For the different beliefs are consistent with the core of liberal conviction that I have tried to articulate.

This is not the place to develop in detail the implications of this doctrine. Nevertheless, the liberal attitudes towards democracy and the welfare state require special discussion because they provide the focus for much left-wing criticism of American liberalism.

Liberal emphasis on the importance of liberty and human rights, and the corresponding sensitivity to the danger of tyrannical abuse of corporate power, has resulted in an insistence on the fundamental value of political democracy. As I argued, this conviction marks the most important difference between liberalism and Marxist humanism. Yet the conviction has in many ways been the soft underbelly of the liberal position. For, too often, in "bourgeois" society formal democracy *has* been "the talking shop" that Marx claimed it was. Parliamentary institutions have been used by vested power to shape the form of policy in manipulatively appealing ways, without affecting its substance. And even when political democracy functions constructively, it is far from providing the panacea for social evils that many like to think it does.

Expression of disdain for political democracy by many on the Left is, therefore, quite understandable. Indeed, we need more, not less, legitimate criticism of the way in which men who are profoundly undemocratic in spirit and action use the instruments of formal democracy to manipulate consensus about matters with respect to which no one can reasonably expect consensus. The time is long overdue for liberals to attack those who, on the pretext of calling the faithful to reason together, use the occasion to manipulate and mesmerize opposition.

But criticism from the Left which proclaims commitment to "participatory democracy" and disdain for American liberalism in the same breath is ironical. For the need to deepen and enrich the quality of the democratic process, to make it both more deliberative and more participatory, flows directly from the central doctrines of liberalism as I have stated them. Those who proclaim their transcendental commitment to

democracy in attacking the liberal tradition have either not read, or not understood Rousseau,\* John Stuart Mill, L. T. Hobhouse, or John Dewey—to mention but a few of the major liberal theorists.

On the other hand, a person who views democracy exclusively in terms of a system of countervailing powers fails to understand that stability and protection against tyranny are neither the only functions of democracy, nor always the most important. At least equally important is provision of the institutional soil which nourishes those very tendencies, sentiments, and powers of mind that enable a person both deliberatively to carve out his career and to play a responsible role in shaping social policies that vitally affect his life. To this extent, the proper charge against uncritical admirers of a conception of democracy conceived exclusively as a way to maintain a delicately balanced system of competing powers, is not that they are too liberal but that they have lost touch with the very core of liberalism. Few are more guilty of fostering the illiberal preference for a countervailing power conception of democracy than those liberals who practice the politics of pseudo-realism—a point that will be subsequently developed.

It is easy, however, to exaggerate this criticism of the liberal realist's conception of democracy. For if a conception of countervailing power is not the whole of a liberal theory of democracy, it is at least an essential part. It is difficult to see how, in the long run, a more participatory and deliberative conception of democracy can be made to function effectively except by preparing the ground for its growth through a system of coalition politics. In such a system the inherent instability of the main coalitions permits both movement and that degree of general social stability without which chaos or revolution would result. Moreover, only within a structure that institutionalizes the competition for power can the tendency to use the instruments of a participatory democracy in manipulative ways be effectively countered—as Yugoslavia's otherwise exciting experiment with workers' councils is beginning to make clear. As these points go to the heart of my criticism of many who practice the politics of self-indulgence, I will develop the argument more fully later. In regard to welfare programs, liberal realists and those who practice the politics of self-indulgence make mistakes that parallel their defective ideas about democracy. The realists exaggerate the virtues of the welfare state; some in the New Left underestimate both its accomplishment and potentials.

---

\* I know there are many who will object to this characterization of Rousseau. Here I can only say that Rousseau's masterwork, the *Social Contract*, is one of the most misread and, consequently, abused books in the history of political philosophy.

Too many liberals sincerely justify a structure of welfare institutions that undermines a person's sense of responsibility, his dignity, and his freedom to make his own choices. Whether expressed as a reform theory of punishment or as a therapeutic theory of social services, there is too much tendency to coerce and manipulate "clients" for their own good. I see no essential moral difference between a rapidly growing social-work profession guided by the notion that it is proper to compel or induce persons to accept therapeutically sound life goals, and a Big Brotherly effort to shape the inner life of citizens so that they come to prefer conformity over dissent, regardless of where the weight of morality and reason may lie.

From these remarks it does *not* follow that the accomplishments of welfare politics are negligible. Perhaps the ability to realize unsound "bourgeois" preferences is part of the price that must be paid for that minimal level of cradle-to-grave economic security without which the very possibility of a transmutation of values can not be achieved. If so, it is a price that should be paid. The unrestrained denunciation of the accomplishments of the welfare state that has become increasingly common among many on the "New Left" is an arrogance, a piece of cultural snobbery, that must be criticized and fought by genuine liberals.

To sum up, liberals aim at conditions that permit and encourage every person to develop his potentialities as fully as possible. This can only happen when efforts to shape both career and public policy are controlled by the disciplines of reason. For liberals, complete freedom is the indispensable *condition* of these goals—qualified only by the moral and prudential constraints of civility, and of liberalism itself. They believe that except for societies in which the cultural and economic prerequisites of democracy have not been achieved, parliamentary institutions are required. And even in the former, the growing points of parliamentary institutions must be steadily created and consolidated. But participatory democracy is both an outcome, and I would here add, a condition of the more "formal" democracy of countervailing coalitions. For no society can pull itself up by its bootstraps. Just as it needs accumulations of capital to fuel its economic growth, so it needs accumulations of the essential traits of the responsible citizen to fuel its political growth. And how are such traits to be acquired without the sustained experience of taking responsibility?

While chary of those who view welfare benefits as a means of manipulating the "needy" into some "therapist's" version of the good life, or into political quiescence, liberals recognize that such benefits are hard-won, valuable concessions wrung at great cost from those who have



clung to privilege. Liberals are, therefore, committed to the task of completing the work of the welfare state, even as they move politically to cope with some of the basic disorders of social life the remedies for which may finally lie beyond the welfare state.

A critic of liberalism may point out the lack of any emphasis on fraternity, community, fellowship in the account I have given. The liberal may properly reply that he has always believed that, to the extent that satisfactory human relationships are possible, their realization depends on the existence of persons who possess dignity, self-esteem, and the cultural and industrial resources required to lead productive and meaningful lives. If society is arranged so that these qualities and resources are possessed by the maximum number of persons possible, then we have done all that can be done *through politics* to satisfy the aspirations people have for communion and salvation.

Implicit in this last remark is a very important thesis—one that has always been inherent in liberal theory. *Politics is limited*. Those who seek to fulfill apocalyptic visions through political activity are bound to become disillusioned. If Calvin, Hobbes, or Freud are correct in their descriptions of human nature, the salvation sought is beyond our worldly reach. Even if pessimistic accounts of human nature are mistaken, there is a sphere of personal struggle and aspiration that one may never be able to affect through the control of the crude levers of power with which political groups must ultimately be content. The realization that this is so is at once the end of innocence and the beginning of effectiveness in the pursuit of legitimate social goals.

## **II. The Need for a Turn Toward Radicalism**

The United States is the representative industrial nation; a harbinger of what nations taking their first, halting steps towards full industrialization may expect—and a warning. Though we have achieved a degree of material affluence that boggles the imagination, the moral and aesthetic costs have often been too high.

The magnitude of American wealth and power has made certain ideals feasible goals of public policy. The President who proclaimed a war on national poverty yesterday proclaims a war on world hunger today. He announces that this country's mission is to defend freedom around the globe. Freedom, he reminds us, is indivisible. But if his actions are any test of actual intentions, he really does not mean it. For the War on Poverty is financially skimpy and politically hamstrung from the start. Success in the war on hunger will require vastly more than the

convenient emptying of the granaries holding America's immense agricultural surpluses. And the sincerity of our defense of freedom is rendered somewhat more than doubtful by our actions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic—to mention only the two most recent outrages in the conduct of American foreign policy.

The point I am making is this: We seem to have entered a political era in which the rhetoric of liberalism is unrestrainedly used either to defend programs of liberal reform that are minimal in magnitude and scope, or to rationalize programs that are illiberal in spirit and intent. In so doing, the present Administration is merely carrying to its most extravagant conclusion a misuse of the rhetoric of liberalism in which every political leader has to some extent participated. Increasingly, Administrations have tended to substitute liberal rhetoric for liberal policy in an effort to allay discontent without risking substantial change. But the strategy will not work for reasons that are entirely out of the control of any American government, except one genuinely prepared to match radical deed to radical word.

There is a dialectic of disorder at work in the world. It is a dialectic every bit as ruthless in its impact on human hopes and values as any Hegel ever dreamed of. It spares no society, and few people. It is impartial in the way it defeats the plans of both dropouts and Presidents. And the misuse of the rhetoric of liberalism has contributed in no small measure to the operation of that dialectic.

For even empty rhetoric generates aspirations among people who take it seriously. Aspirations kindle new and concrete hopes. But then the emptiness of the rhetoric is revealed in the paucity and perversion of the implementing programs. Thus expectations are not fulfilled, and frustration and bitter anger result. The expression of this anger differs, depending on the intensity of the expectations and the extent of the gap between program and fulfillment. In the ghettos of Los Angeles and Rochester there are bloody riots. At Berkeley there are all-night sit-ins and "filthy speech." At Michigan, teach-ins. In Mississippi, an attempt is made to take over an air base. And America's Catholic hierarchy encounters the most exasperating challenge to its authority from subordinate priests and laymen with which it has ever had to deal.

But the dialectic of disorder that results from the gap between rhetoric and practice in the United States is as nothing when compared with the ferocious consequences of frustrated expectations and revolutionary action abroad. In Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nigeria, in Syria, the Congo, and Yemen, men and women touched by hope and expectation for the first time in their

lives, for the first time in the lives of generations, are plunged into open and bloody rebellion. But our leaders seem to understand the one no better than the other. The Sheriff Clark who terrorizes children is but a step removed from Chief Parker who believes that the only way to deal with the rioters of Watts is to beat them over the head. And he in turn is but a step away from the President who, despite all his disclaimers, places his faith mainly in napalm and rockets. What price freedom? Approximately nine noncombatants and \$375,000 per Viet Cong dead.\* I am sure that each of these men must, in a quiet moment, suffer nausea at the things they "must" authorize. They are as much victims as oppressors. And they do differ substantially in their moral outlook. But they have in common an inability to understand the dialectic of disorder; and a consequent tendency to cope with disorder by beating people over the head.

Equally important—they mistake political quiescence for joy. Before the Montgomery bus boycott the entire segregationist population of the South had deluded itself into believing that the "darkies" were content with their lot. One Southern segregationist recently echoed that mood unwittingly when he wistfully complained that he could not understand why "the niggers ain't singing anymore." This victim of Southern racism is unable to understand that, when one cannot hope, there is little to do but mask misery and terror with song. But once hope is kindled, the songs end, the dialectic of disorder begins, and, before long, disorderly process is converted into insistent political pressure.

Thus, if liberal rhetoric does breed anger and discord, it also generates hope and political movement. This at least is to the good. For the time is brought closer when American liberals will reclaim their rhetoric and put it firmly back into the service of radical change. Confronted by the sordid reality of American affluence, it is impossible for someone to be authentically liberal without turning resolutely toward radicalism. Thus, to the extent that the rhetoric of political leaders encourages sincere commitment to liberalism, it also fosters opposition to the illiberal allocation of America's vast resources, and to the illiberal use of America's vast power.

The time must come when the recitation of past liberal achievements no longer tranquilizes American liberals. For scrutiny of the present state of American society discovers a reality that is at least as outrageous as it is full of products and promise.

---

\*Bernard B. Fall, "And Still the Little Men of the Vietcong Keep Coming," *New York Times Magazine*, March 6, 1966, p. 21. A. D. Borchgrave, "Then and Now—The Difference," *Newsweek*, March 14, 1966, p. 41.

### **1. The Distribution of Wealth**

The United States is economically one of the most unequal societies in the world, and the most affluent. The fifth of the nation that is poverty-stricken gives the lie to any claim that we have learned how to manage our affluence in a humanly acceptable way.

The very magnitude of our national resources makes it possible to maintain an adequate incentive system, and still meet all the functional needs generated by the moral preeminence of personal self-development in the liberal scheme of things. Ironically, just when Communist nations are discovering that they must reintroduce sharper material incentives, the United States is in a position to reverse the emphasis traditionally placed on them.

Increasingly, the most important incentives are the quality of the conditions of work and the value the individual places on the products of his labor. It is clear that the main barriers to redistribution are not those that flow from the requirements of continued economic growth, but the entrenched power of moneyed elites who, either out of habit or acquisitiveness, insist on interpreting the rhetoric of American freedom in the least human way possible. These forces are often unwittingly abetted by good-hearted folk who are willing to accept the first, tiny product of massive legislative effort as sufficient because it is so beguilingly packaged by the Great Society.

For the indefinite future, the problems of redistribution are going to be complicated by the technological revolution that is in process. The long-term prospect is steady attrition in the supply of jobs. Thus, the nation is conditioned to accept as a triumph of political statesmanship a rate of unemployment that a humane society should not tolerate.

The dialectic of disorder operates with increasing ferocity in this area. Rent strikes, a rising crime rate, intensified problems of juvenile delinquency, and the growth of general contempt for formal authority are only a few of the by-products of the growing gap between the rhetoric of affluence and the reality of poverty. And these disorders are increasingly independent of the problem of race.

### **2. Civil Rights**

The United States is still a predominantly racist society. Economically, socially, legally, politically, and perhaps most important of all, educationally, we have eliminated many legal barriers, yet have made little progress in fact. In comparison with fifteen years ago, Negroes are more segregated, receive a smaller proportion of the national income, constitute a higher proportion of the unemployed, the under-educated,

and the blue-collar work force. The only area in which Negroes appear to have made massive gains during the last decade and a half is in the proportion of war-time casualties they are constrained to accept. For in the Vietnam War, over 14 percent of the combatants and 18 percent of the casualties are Negro soldiers, though only about 10 percent of the total population is Negro.\* Thus we are confronted by the supreme moral irony; those who share least in the fruits of American freedom are, in its alleged defense, making the supreme sacrifice proportionately more of the time than those who benefit most.

The White majority and its allies within the Negro middle class are oblivious to these facts. They are all too ready to accept the tokens of political appointment, the forms of a changing legal code, the apparent moderation of more virulent racial attitudes, and the promise of presidential rhetoric for the substance of significant change. But though there may have been substantial progress for a small proportion of lucky Negroes, the great bulk of the 20 million Negroes in America have participated in this progress only to the extent that their expectations have risen without a proportionate increase in the relative extent to which those expectations are satisfied.

Twelve years after the school desegregation decision, 95 percent of Southern schools are segregated. Though unemployment for all groups is down, the rate of Negro unemployment relative to whites is rising. Since 1955, in Alabama, 20 persons have been murdered in circumstances growing out of the civil rights movement, and no one has to date been convicted for any of these crimes. In Harlem the mortality rate at birth for Negroes is currently 45 per 1,000; for the total New York City population, including the Negroes of Harlem, about 25 per 1,000. In Mississippi the median income for Negroes is 32 percent of the median income for whites. These are but a few of the large number of facts that dramatize the gap between what Negroes have been promised and what they have actually received. A white majority, spoon-fed facts that largely point to progress in civil rights, is then utterly astonished by violence in Watts or Rochester.

This white majority and its Negro allies then grow impatient at the rising tempo of demonstrations, violence, and threatened violence by Negroes. The characteristic reaction of officialdom, whether in Selma or in Watts, is to club the incorrigibles into submission. In no other phase

---

\*It is true that many of the Negroes in combat in Vietnam are formally volunteers. But when they can escape from the black belt of the South or the ghettos of the North only by enlisting in the Army, then we have compulsion. As one VISTA worker in Alabama told me recently, many young Negroes he encountered were happy to be accepted by the Armed forces. But their motive was escape, not patriotism.

of domestic life, however, does the dialectic of disorder work with such ruthless efficiency to destroy the illusions of those “decent and respectable” Americans who stand ready to do anything—anything at all—to improve human relations—*except* seriously to contemplate the necessity of relinquishing many of their basic social and economic prerogatives.

### 3. Education

The Groves of Academe are increasingly the scene of guerrilla warfare. Sit-ins, teach-ins, demonstrations, filthy-speech, and teachers’ strikes—all are the products of the same fundamental disorders of American education. Disorderly process in our schools, a source of so much perplexity to most, is not difficult to understand from the point of view of liberalism.

For education, more than any other process, is essential to the achievement of a society in which persons carve out their destiny according to their natures and their own deliberative choices. It is in our schools that the traditions of reason should be honored and cultivated, the power of the human agent to live authentically and autonomously celebrated and encouraged. And in large measure reason is honored, autonomy is celebrated. But the prevailing rhetoric is not translated into educational policy. Quite the reverse, the actual trend of developments makes more and more difficult the achievement of promised goals. The Socratic ideal of the examined life gives way to an educational process that rewards academic imperialism, fits individuals to socially needed functional slots, and, by means of paternal manipulation, adapts students for that conformity to the conventional wisdom which a society devoted to consensus and minimal disturbance of the social order requires.

But academic administrators, no more than political leaders, can escape the impact of the dialectic of disorder. Youngsters who are promised one thing, given another, and provided with enough of the intellectual and moral resources to realize that they have been defrauded will, at least occasionally, take it out on the “system.” And well they should.

Disraeli’s aphorism, “Any man who is not a radical in his twenties lacks a heart, while any man who remains a radical after thirty lacks a head,” is, in its application to the United States, only half right. The tragedy of student radicalism is not that it exists, but that it so quickly atrophies. How could it be otherwise? Student radicals have been deprived to the same extent as their more conservative contemporaries of systematic training in the disciplines of reason and of exposure to morally serious models whose notion of “responsibility” does not preclude radical dissent. No group in higher education is more massively victimized than undergraduates—who suffer most from the inverted system of priorities

that rewards organizational skills more than research, research more than graduate teaching, graduate teaching more than undergraduate teaching, the teaching of undergraduate honor students more than the teaching of those whose need for skilled and dedicated teachers is greatest.

If life in the multiversity is too often fraudulent, it at least provides the increasingly essential passport to the fulfillment of those more material aspirations that American society encourages one to have. Hence, the fact that millions are excluded from the privileges of higher education for economic reasons alone is doubly scandalous. Not only are these persons deprived of even the illusion of participating in what is promised by American rhetoric, they are also excluded from the material opportunities necessary to participate in the reality of commercial success. And even when opportunities are available, inadequate early education deprives millions of others of developing either the motivation or the necessary skills for achieving what is conventionally termed "success" in more advanced schooling.

This is not to deny that the United States is doing better than most in educating youth. But for a nation possessing our resources, today's best is at least a light-year away from being good enough. Thus, we have another American dilemma—bad educational processes, inequitably accessible, rationalized by an almost empty rhetoric of educational ideals.

#### **4. Conditions of Work**

Due primarily to industrial organization and the unprecedented period of relative prosperity this nation has enjoyed, since the beginning of World War II, the opportunity to exercise power arbitrarily has greatly diminished in our work-places. This abatement of industrial tyranny is due primarily to the creation of a system of industrial due process that, though far from being comprehensive, does protect most blue- and white-collar workers. This system of due process—and not rising wages and salaries—is trade unionism's major achievement. Ask any fairly sophisticated group of leaders from union locals, as I have done, and they will tell you that this is so.

But if due process is an achievement, and a historic agenda that remains to be completed, there is another problem that has hardly been perceived, let alone attacked. For, though the work place is not the theater of tyrannical exercise of power in its more blatant forms, (e.g. sweat shops, company stores, Pinkertons, brutal foremen, etc. are gradually disappearing) it is the place where life is lived in its most routine, uncreative, spirit-searing—in a word, dehumanized—forms.

In an article in which he brilliantly analyzes the impact of modern industrial conditions on workers, Harvey Swados suggests that until

workers acquire control of production standards, the very rules of the industrial game, no matter how impartially applied, will perpetuate and aggravate this dehumanizing aspect of the work process.\* (Shades of early Marx.) For the company's primary concern is to increase profits. When wages, fringe benefits, and the more general conditions of work are rigidly prescribed by collective bargaining agreement, the competitive pressures with which the company will normally deal will force management to do one of two things: make technological improvements that eliminate jobs or speed up the work process. The threat of the former gives them a lever by which they can achieve the latter. The imperatives of speed-up require the elimination of all those "frictional" concessions that mitigate efficiency. Moreover, the very existence of due process removes the last reservation the conscientious manager might have about authorizing a speed-up. It actually permits him to treat the worker like a machine, with good conscience. For the worker has his contract and is guaranteed his day in court, should he disagree with the manager's application of its provisions. Doesn't he?

Once again the dialectic of disorder operates with a ruthless impartiality. Unless trade unions take appropriate steps, the day is coming when most strikes will be unofficial and directed not against employers, but against labor leadership itself. For, in the very nature of the case, "responsible" union leadership "must" support employers in their legitimate application of contractual provisions and therefore often assist marginal producers to survive by stretching points in their favor, both during and after negotiations. But the rhetoric of the trade union movement proclaims that the trade union leader is a worker's best friend. Confronted by the gap between that rhetoric and the dehumanized reality of the work process, there will be disorder within the industrial community. And all the decent and respectable members of the professional middle class will decry the "irresponsibility" of the "greedy" workers.

Liberalism's course is clear. It must reinterpret and apply the moral insights of older syndicalist theorists of industrial democracy, like G. D. H. Cole and John Dewey. For in the industrial community, as in the larger political community, protection of human rights requires democratic process.

### **5. Legal Justice**

If due process is close to having been realized in that part of industry which is organized, it is far from having been achieved within the formal structures of the law. The legal rights of the poor, of the Negroes,

---

\*Harvey Swados, *The UAW and Walter Reuther*, DISSENT, Autumn 1963.



and of those who profess unpopular political creeds are still too often violated. This comes about partly through unequal administration of existing rules, but more often through the social prejudice that influences the very construction of rules of legal process.

Almost all executions are of persons that come from deprived backgrounds. Indigents rarely get adequate legal counsel; and when they do, they often obtain that counsel after their rights have already been violated in the pre-trial process. The Imbau method of interrogation, now widely used by police, is refined brain-washing. The drawing of juries and grand juries is often so contaminated by racial and social prejudice, that there is little possibility of a fair trial. Standards of mitigation and criminal responsibility all favor the more socially respectable members of the community. And the severity of the sentences that American justices often hand out are an international scandal.

Conditions of penal servitude and rules of legal commitment frequently violate the most basic principles of liberalism. In the guise of *treatment*, the individual's basic right to freedom of choice, with all the fateful consequences for good and ill in his own life and in the life of society, is violated. Reform is alright when the process and aim is the development of the virtues of a free citizen, not when it masks an effort to manipulate the criminal or patient into conformity. In the guise of liberal reform, commitment to mental institutions has become a thoroughly illiberal device for getting obnoxious persons out of sight and under guard.

One is not less a manipulating tyrant if he makes his appearance as warden, psychiatrist, prison guard, hospital attendant, hospital administrator, or social worker. To no social evil is the basic thrust of liberal theory more definite and more important. For if, in the name of abstract justice, morally committed persons will not protect a person to whom family and neighbor are likely to be indifferent, who will?

It is, therefore, not enough to acknowledge real virtues in the existing system of law, or the substantial progress that has been made in the last half century. Liberals must devise means of dealing with the extremely recalcitrant problems that remain.

#### **6. Urban and Rural Life**

As antiseptic suburbs grow, and the decay of central cities is accelerated by materialism, exhaust, and rapacious landlords, the natural setting in which the dialectic of disorder can play itself out is created.

The problem of creating a decent physical environment for urban Americans has become so acute that the President has created the Department of Urban Affairs and has proposed a Department of Transport-

tation. But no administrative gimmick, nor any of the Administration's current proposals for remedying the situation, has any prospect of correcting the basic problem—entrenched property interests that generally have the power to kill any decent measure of reform, and in pursuit of more profits almost invariably exercise that power in ways that subordinate or ignore considerations of aesthetics, health, and morality. Urban renewal is an anodyne that generally benefits middle-income groups more than lower-income people who are displaced by the public projects. Desegregation by law seems only to hasten segregation in fact in urban school districts. And the ugliness of the central city is mitigated only by the central city businessmen's efforts to lure the shopping-center crowd back through "beautification" of their surroundings.

### **7. Cumulative Impact**

Liberalism is concerned not only that a person have freedom to do those things he prefers, but that what he prefers result from the fullest possible exposure to the existing range of possibilities. For only then can the freedom to choose in a deliberative way be assured. Only then can we have any reasonable assurance that choice is a fulfillment, and not a waste of a person's power.

Liberals must tread a delicate line between cultural authoritarianism and cultural liberation—but in the name of the latter they must criticize the cultural market-place that so restricts choice that what exists today comes close to being a cultural wasteland. Those who have the time and money, and know where to look, can find the cultural products they are seeking. But most ordinary Americans with relatively educated tastes find that they are discriminated against in a most egregious fashion. Here, as always, commercial criteria conflict sharply with the deliberative and aesthetic criteria that mark the difference between amusement and intensely human experience.

This is not to say that any male with a Ph.D., gonads, and a masculine ego is incapable of enjoying half-nude women and Western bravado very much. But during any given evening, during any given hour, both he and his female counterpart should like at least to have the opportunity to taste aesthetically and intellectually more venturesome fare than is available on radio and television in most places. Yet, in the final analysis, it must be admitted that the debasement of taste in this country is not the primary responsibility of those who presently control the media of mass communication. With the best will in the world, and many active in the mass media have very good will, they are constrained by conditions of the market. Defiance would take greater social and financial courage that is normally allotted to businessmen. These con-

ditions are the cumulative product of institutional derangements described in all that has preceded. If an individual's life were rich in other respects, he would normally neither need to escape by consuming debased cultural fare, nor suffer harm or loss if he did. It is against the background of dehumanization from cradle to grave that the provision of special cultural opportunities takes on special importance.

The impact of the conditions I have described on our cultural lives is bad; their cumulative effect on the texture of the whole of American life is disastrous. The gap between rhetoric and reality is so wide, the values actually operative so unrelated to biological, intellectual, and spiritual development in its fullest sense, that an authentically human existence for most Americans is an impossibility. Perhaps most disastrous of all is that the operative criteria of public esteem, on which one's self-esteem and self-respect are so dependent, are sufficiently remote from the rhetoric of morality, intellect, and aesthetics proclaimed on ceremonial occasions, that the very possibility of living a life of integrity is deeply eroded when it is not destroyed. This is the common experience of the sensitive youngsters an older generation does not permit itself to understand fully. Understanding would require these older persons to face the lies that have controlled and impoverished their own lives. An older person can not normally be expected to admit this to himself. For error, persistently pursued, traps the human mind. The more fateful the error, the more complete the entrapment. And so human error normally enlarges itself. The parent who has guided the child mistakenly redoubles his effort to "bring the child to his senses." The President who has guided his nation mistakenly does the same. The fault must be made to lie elsewhere—for sanity's sake.

Our spiritual, educational, and political leaders celebrate "freedom"; but they too often mean "bend your knee to power and consensus." They proclaim "democracy"; but they too often mean submission to the existing structure of corporate power. They call for "honesty, truth, and morality"; but they too often practice deception, hypocrisy, and ruthless violation of the rights of others in "patriotic" pursuit of policy-aims "vital to the national interest." They debase the quality of the democratic process and attribute what they do to "love of country."

Where once the basic power and prerogatives of privileged elites was maintained primarily through more naked exercise of power, reliance is increasingly placed instead on the effort to limit the mind's power rationally to understand public policy. The result is extremism on the Right, and manipulated consensus in the middle.

What can a person of the Left who values authenticity do in the

light of such conditions except grow progressively alienated from our predominantly middle-class culture—and, quite incidentally, grow long finger nails and a beard?

“Be realistic,” answer most American liberals.

### **III. The Politics of Pseudo-Realism**

The best statement of this most “realistic solution” I have ever encountered appeared in a student editorial entitled “Students Must Choose Between Politics and Ideals”:

. . . (P)olitics is the art of the possible. This is always a difficult adage for students, largely involved in one sort of political idealism or another, to accept. The “student movement” has lost sight of it. But if students expect to exert influence of any kind in society, they must accept it and realize that if what they want is the “impossible,” they must find means outside the established political order to implement it.

Politics must be accepted for what it is—amoral. Students would either have to compromise their ideals in order to participate or forget about participation. There is no reason to assume that student participation in the governmental processes would substantially alter the character of the American government.

Students are double-damned. If they participate in politics, idealism of necessity goes out the window. If they do not enter the larger political sphere, they find that large and vital areas of concern, such as the future of the human race, are outside their scope. They must choose.

Out of the mouths of babes come the deranged teachings of their fathers. The author poses a cruel dilemma. Happily, it is also a false dilemma. To understand why the dilemma is false and why the preferred alternative of political realism is unacceptable, a philosophical exploration of the very bases of political thought and action is required.

From student editorial to Aristotle. The ascent is steep, but the path direct. For Aristotle, the supreme rational conservative, provides the clearest possible statement of realism’s vital principle. “We deliberate about things that are in our power and can be done.” And that is all we do, or even *can* deliberate about. Aristotle was so deeply committed to this principle that it shaped the very sense “deliberation” had for him. His meaning is clear; even the attempt to determine how to achieve an impossible object is a defect of intellect so gross that the thought processes involved do not merit the name, “deliberation.” But two questions must be answered: How is one to determine what is, or is not, impossible? And what is the relationship between the belief that some object is impossible, and the likelihood that it will not be achieved?

The realist's answer to both questions is clear. The facts, scientifically established, reveal what is possible and what is not. The Gradgrind of political life, the realist proclaims ". . . we want nothing but Facts sir, nothing but Facts!" And, as facts are "out there," waiting to be discovered by inquiring intellect, what a man believes to be possible is not relevant to whether or not it is possible.

Aristotle crossed by the spirit of science; what could provide a more respectable intellectual facade for determined opposition to radical chance? Science is a form of life. And like all other forms of life, it is, as Freud once said (and then forgot) governed "by deep-rooted internal prejudices, into whose hands our speculation unwittingly plays." In politics, the rhetoric of science no more guarantees moral rectitude, or even strategic acumen, than the rhetoric of Christian morality guarantees a righteous cause or good heart.

This holds no less for the liberal realist than the conservative realist. The liberal realist's criteria for assessing "the facts," and his very perception of "fact" are unwittingly governed by deep-rooted internal prejudices. He does not consciously betray his liberal commitments. Indeed, he possesses a most ingenious arsenal of defensive forms for masking his betrayal from himself. The two that deserve special mention are role-playing, and the view that politics is an amoral enterprise.

### **1. Role-Playing and Anticipatory Surrender**

The role-player assumes that he is somehow not meeting his obligations as a responsible citizen unless, before making a political judgment, he views matters *as if* he were the official who has the formal power to act. This he does, not simply to understand and sympathize, but because he regards role-playing as required by the dictum that only deliberation about possibilities is warranted. If, from the President's point of view, a certain course of action is impossible, the role-player would think it deeply irresponsible for anyone to press the President to take that action

For example, a really massive War on Poverty, involving expenditures of \$100 billion over a five-year period, is under consideration. The role-player asks, "Can he get the legislation through the Congress?" If not, then he concludes that it is irresponsible for liberals to press for such a program.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk recently urged role-playing when considering the Vietnam issue. At a hearing held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he advised every American to ask himself, "What would I do about this if I were President of the United States?"—and to make his political judgment on that basis. I can think of no advice which

reflects a more defective understanding of the nature of responsible citizenship in a democracy.

For the policies endorsed by officials, from President down to the lowest policy-making levels, are almost invariably the product of a great many different, often conflicting, pressures. A person who role-plays by putting himself in the place of men at the center of power, in effect *abandons any effort to make his special concerns and interests a part of the system of pressures that help shape the official's decision*. Hence, members of groups who tend to role-play are, in effect, cancelling any influence on policy they might exert. It is this tendency to role-play that has helped make authentic liberalism an increasingly peripheral force in American politics.

The most direct result of role-playing is *anticipatory surrender* of bargaining points. Since compromise is part of the art of politics, it requires a position forcefully articulated, persistently pressed, there to be compromised. Role-playing that results in anticipatory surrender will prove unrealistic. For the compromises made by officials will then almost inevitably be responsive only to pressures that have *not* been negated by anticipatory surrender—hence, the realists's pseudo-realism.

Rusk's counsel to the American people is the inversion of role-playing by an ordinary citizen. A responsible official who feels himself at the center of a system of forces tugging in different directions, would normally welcome pressures that make it more possible for him to adopt a policy closer to his own, ideal preference. Thus, for example, if the President and his Secretary of State do want to reserve the right to negotiate the form of an interim South Vietnamese government at the bargaining table, they should welcome the proposal made by Senators J. William Fulbright and Robert Kennedy that the National Liberation Front be granted a role in a governing coalition.\* For this both increases the uncertainty about American intentions in the minds of the adversary, and gives the Administration greater political freedom to compromise once it does sit down at the negotiating table. The fact that they react as if men like Senators Kennedy and Fulbright are stabbing them in the back will inevitably be interpreted by the adversary as good evidence that America's stated willingness to compromise on meaningful points is phony.

The process of identifying with the predicaments of others does have its uses. For, properly employed, it *increases* a person's political effectiveness by giving him a better sense of just where his limited power may be

---

\*Perhaps they do so privately. But all the evidence seems to indicate that they are more furious with their critics in private than in public.

most effectively applied. Moreover, it diminishes those blaming-tendencies that so contaminate the capacity for detached political judgment—a vital condition of effectiveness. But empathy as a means of achieving maximum effectiveness should not be confused with role-playing.

## **2. The Amorality of Politics**

The liberal realist tends to regard concern for the morality of political judgment and action as mere moralism. He tends to reserve his own invocation of moral principles for ceremonial occasions. In the councils of government, or of party, as journalist, educator, or man of God, he is the first to eschew the relevance of moral principle, the last to measure the propriety of the means in terms of anything other than their effectiveness in relation to “practical” goals. Morality is pertinent only in establishing a general goal as desirable. And in deciding questions of foreign policy, even this degree of morality is impermissible—the sole concern being for the national interest. The practicality of the goal and the effectiveness of means to that end are purely factual matters.

I have heard an ordained Presbyterian minister who happens to be a consultant to the Department of Defense argue that as a Christian he should not obey an order to fire nuclear weapons, but that his moral reservations are irrelevant to matters of policy because they require political, not moral judgment.

The President betrayed a similar tendency when, commenting on recent Vietnam protests, he expressed surprise that “any person would feel toward his country in a way that is not consistent with the national interest.”

I can think of no attitude more destructive of a civilized effort to cope with political problems. For these sentiments come out of the mouths, not always of cruel men, but often of morally sensitive officials who are the products of some of the best instruction our moral traditions make available. The attitude leads to an identification of national security with *any* national interest, and then to identification of national prestige with national security. Our young men are then committed to battle in a fruitless effort to forestall genuine social revolution rooted less in ideological commitment than in human misery resulting from decades of neglect and exploitation. The folly is then labelled “patriotism,” and dissenters are accused of practicing “neo-isolationism” and “near treason.” The path is precipitous and difficult to avoid once one has taken the first fateful step of construing politics as an amoral enterprise. When what the amoral view implies becomes clear, morally sensitive men are either driven into opposition, or go into an acquiescent state of moral shock.

It is tempting to criticize the realist's amorality as morally vicious, and to let matters go at that. In fact, even if one grants the amorality of politics, the view generates some of the deepest and most perplexing problems of political philosophy.

For one thing, the factual judgments made in support of political action almost inevitably go beyond the available evidence. This is so for two reasons: First, the amount of evidence that one may theoretically take into account is unlimited. But, more important, in political life, the actual evidence available, is, as a rule, severely limited. Hence, factual judgments are made in conditions of indeterminacy in two different respects. Before developing the implications of the fact indeterminacy that exists for official and ordinary citizen alike, let me illustrate the claims, to fix their meaning more precisely.

Consider the factual judgment, "Communist China is an aggressive nation." What sorts of facts tend to confirm this statement? Well, there are the facts of actual Chinese military actions—against India, against Tibet, against Taiwan, against U.S. forces in Korea, against the off-shore islands. There are facts such as the ideology of revolution Chinese leaders profess. And there are speeches such as the famous one by Marshall Lin Piao. One could go on listing facts that tend to confirm the hypothesis of Chinese military aggressiveness. It is clear, however, that even if the evidence were unambiguous, there is always the possibility that embarrassing facts might turn up which go against the trend of evidence. Thus, many who thought they had enormous evidence for their belief that Russia was unalterably Stalinist in its basic institutional structure, were astonished by Khrushchev's famous denunciation of Stalin. And many others who believed firmly that totalitarian societies are incapable of the creativity and "know-how" to develop advanced technology, were shaken to their toes by Sputnik. Similar surprises may undermine current beliefs about China.

In fact, however, the state of the evidence for the hypothesis of Chinese aggressiveness is not nearly as clear as the catalogue alluded to above would suggest. China experts tell us that China has not, in fact, ever moved against territories with respect to which historic Chinese claims to sovereignty were not substantial. The sole exception is Korea; and there the presence of American military forces within sight of the Manchurian border could reasonably be viewed as an intolerable provocation. Marshall Piao's speech is interpreted differently by those who note that he does, after all, cautiously promise that China will give more vigorous support to wars of national liberation only "when we grow in strength as time goes on . . ."; which suggests that military interven-



tion is not in prospect now, unless . . . Moreover it is, after all, China that is encircled; and in the circumstances, a little defensive bellicosity is humanly to be expected. All this goes to prove, not that China is benign, but that the state of the evidence is at best indeterminate.

Given that for major judgments about facts in politics the evidence is almost always going to be incomplete, the beliefs on which a person finally settles are quite inevitably going to be governed "by deep-rooted internal prejudices"—by self-interest and ideological commitment. For if there is a gap between what is known and what is believed, then something besides what is known must have influenced what is believed. To think otherwise is self-deluding, and therefore irrational. Hence, the irony of the realist's position is that by worshiping fact he increases the probability that he will form beliefs irrationally. One who despises and fears Communism will selectively assess the evidence for the claim that China is aggressive, and *leap* to the conclusion that she is incorrigibly aggressive. By the same token, a realist who despises and fears "American imperialism" will selectively assess the evidence for the claim that the controlling principle of American foreign policy is counter-revolution.

The very language of fact is ideologically controlled. Consider the term "aggression." What does it mean? Is one country an aggressor against another when the first supplies training bases, logistical support, finances, armament, munitions, and some manpower to a group of nationals of another country so that they can more effectively fight the established government? Then both American action against Cuba at the time of the Bay of Pigs disaster, and North Vietnamese action against South Vietnam are acts of aggression. But if such support is not sufficient to constitute aggression, if the fighting force is predominantly indigenous to the country in which the fighting is taking place, then neither action constitutes aggression. This is why the United States, *had* to propagate the myth that North Vietnamese were in the South in force prior to its escalation of the war. But how many who believe that North Vietnam is not an aggressor believe that the U.S. was? And how many "patriotic" Americans, who would deny that this country was an aggressor against Cuba, would passionately insist that we must defend the South Vietnamese because they have been the victims of aggression?

I was present one evening when a government official was asked whether he thought Communism was monolithically and unreservedly committed to the promotion of revolution everywhere. He replied, "Of course." Then he hesitated for a moment, and continued, "Except Yugoslavia; and she is not Communist at all." What's in a name? If the name is politically central enough, then an ideologue's most "deep-

rooted internal prejudices" are bound to be in it. And, as there is no ideologue like a blind ideologue, realists, blinded as they are by their worship of fact, are the worst ideologues of all.

Moreover, to the extent that a realist's narrower interests tend to reinforce his fact-worship, he will have a double motive for concealing from himself the epistemological status of his fact judgments. But this is only to restate Marx's theory of class consciousness in an epistemologically relevant, non-ideological way.

There is another point to be made here—one that has special appeal to radicals and special pertinence to the realist's maxim that one should pursue only what is possible. Regardless of how scrupulous factual inquiry leading to particular judgments may have been, to be limited in political aspiration to only what one believes can be achieved is more often than not to settle for less than one can achieve. William James made this point insistently and eloquently—and earned much abuse and misunderstanding for his trouble:

Any philosophy which makes such questions as *What is the ideal type of community?* depend on the question of *What is going to succeed?* must needs fall back on personal belief as one of the ultimate conditions of the truth. For again and again success depends on energy of act, faith in turn on faith that we are right—which faith verifies itself.

I do not want to defend all the epistemological implications of this passage taken literally. What James is *at least* saying is that the likelihood that a goal will be achieved often depends on whether it is believed to be possible. "Faith" in the practicality of an aim is a condition of one's determination to pursue that aim, which is in turn an important condition of successful effort. Hence, the very rejection of a political goal as "impossible" or "impractical" or "unrealistic" tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The difference between what is possible and what is impossible is often the will to believe.

James is suggesting an even more radical thesis—in both senses of the word "radical." He believed that one's very conception of "rationality" in political life, as in any other form of life, is in part shaped by temperament. The contrast between optimistic and pessimistic temperament pervades his work. It was his view that these "temperamental" factors cause the pessimist to reject as irrational risks that the optimist would accept as rational. In the application of this point, to political life at least, James seems to me to be indisputably correct. The radical, necessarily more optimistic about achieving a certain radical goal than the conservative, will tend to regard as a rational aim of political effort the goal which the conservative regards as irrational. But they may

arrive at these different judgments on the basis of the same evidence. Not only fact but one's very conception of rationality may be influenced by ideology.

For all these reasons, even if one were to grant the realist's premise that morality ought to be irrelevant to political judgment, this would not make the moral point of view implicit in ideology irrelevant—because it *can not* help but influence political judgment. The realist's dictum is itself a moral maxim that counsels us to accept a psychological impossibility—and it is therefore both unrealistic and a major source of irrationality in politics.

This point has special importance these days to those who proclaim the end of ideology. In the thirties many morally passionate young men were gulled into uncritical endorsement of various forms of Marxist ideology. With an arrogance whose magnificence is often overshadowed only by their egoism, they assume that if it happened to them in the thirties, it is likely to happen to anyone today. Thus, they set themselves up as the moral guardians of the present political generation—warning all against the insidious attractions of the Gods that failed.

The most certain prophylaxis against mistaken commitment is, of course, absence of firm commitment. Hence, they proclaim the dangers of ideological thinking and the virtues of “the politics of the event.” On almost every one of the fundamental political issues of our day they tend to reinforce conservatism and reaction in the name of liberalism. They exaggerated the rigidities of the Soviet system under Stalin, eroded the determination to resist McCarthyism, strengthen those who condemn a sensitively moral response to United States adventures in foreign policy, side with those who defend the institutions of the bureaucratically stifling university, exaggerate the “aggressiveness” of Communist China, and so on. But surely the present political generation should not be made to pay for the failures of soured latter-day radicals.

Liberal realists are forever urging that we support government officials—especially if they speak in the idiom of liberalism. For they have access to privileged facts, and they normally do the best they can. Liberal officials do often deserve our understanding and even our compassion. If that is all that is meant by “support,” I will not quarrel with the realist. But if he means that these officials also deserve our trust, then the radical liberal should be clear and definite in his reply; *no official ought to be trusted*. Not only do the contaminating epistemological factors described above operate on government officials, who tend more than most to be realists, but there are special reasons for mistrusting officials that have an absolutely decisive cumulative weight.

With the best liberal will in the world, government officials at the top of the totem pole are necessarily responsive to a system of political pressures that is bound to produce distortion of perception and judgment. A President is duty-bound to be responsive to the concerns expressed by members of the corporate elite, and of the John Birch Society as well as of the poor and of Negroes, if only because he must think of how most effectively to pursue a liberal legislative program. In addition, who can doubt that once a bad decision is made—especially bad decisions that cost vast sums of money and much American blood—it becomes psychologically almost impossible for the officials responsible to admit that they have erred. Kenneth Galbraith put the point that I am generalizing concretely when he wrote:

Things have been going badly for the United States in South Vietnam for some time and to those of us who have been roughly in touch with the situation the reasons have seemed tolerably clear. The advocates of the wrong policy have been in charge and are deeply committed to their error. When things go wrong, they redouble their efforts, which, inevitably, makes things twice as bad.

Commitment to existing policy, right or wrong, is the highly probable destiny of public officials implicated in the formulation of that policy. To bring the French colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria to an end, there *had* to be a change of leadership.

In Vietnam, Robert McNamara has found his Edsel. At Ford, where profits are the final arbiter of managerial skill, he would undoubtedly have had the good sense to stop production by now. But for a government official, the criteria of success and failure are not so definite. Hence, even if he is a morally sensitive person—perhaps especially if he is a morally sensitive official—he will “redouble” his efforts if only because he cannot honestly face the prospect of conceding that his policy has squandered American lives. The true measure of President Kennedy’s quite remarkable capacity for detached political judgment was that he could stop short of the final folly during the Bay of Pigs adventure—and could later admit that he had erred disastrously. But he was capable of the initial folly both there and in Vietnam; and few will deny that the present occupant of the White House, and most other liberal Presidents, have been more apt to display thin skin than cool intellectual judgment in such situations.

As for government officials farther down, consider their predicament. Not only are they constrained to advocate government policy by virtue of the formal definition of their offices, but there are other powerful psychological forces at work. For one thing, they share with key decision-

makes the necessity of responding to the existing system of political pressures. More important, perhaps, is the fact that advancement in their careers depends on their learning how to play the bureaucratic game—and that means working diligently for a policy even when there is personal disagreement. But, at the same time, like any other human being, such an official needs to maintain his self-respect. If he is forced to advocate a policy of which he disapproves and if he is a person of any integrity the psychic pain that results may be substantial. If the issue is momentous, and the official does not have the will or good sense to resign, then he is likely to make the psychological adjustments required for him truthfully to say that he accepts the offensive policy. And this will be so even if, on the basis of background and past record, it might seem inconceivable that he would. This is undoubtedly a good part of the story of Adlai Stevenson's final tragic months. A man who took as much pride in his record of honest public utterance, and who was as dedicated to the fundamental tasks of the United Nations as Stevenson, must have found it literally impossible either to escape his responsibilities or to defend policies with which he heartily disagreed. For, paradoxically, the Puritan in politics is heavily dependent on the approbation of peers to sustain his dedicated honesty. But how can he expect, or accept, the approbation of those he respects, unless he is capable of respecting himself? And how can he respect himself unless he accepts the policies he is bound to advocate in open council?

Given this impressive system of forces working to distort both the perception and judgment of all public officials, any ordinary citizen does well to view skeptically all who claim to know because they are specially rational or because they have access to privileged information—especially when the decisions involved are those most likely to whip up patriotic passion and the mindless support that results. Indeed, lacking other grounds, the patriotism of a free man in a free society would be sufficient to justify such skepticism.

A wise sovereign would have the intellect and strength of character to recognize this as the proper posture for the good citizen. He would realize not only that power tends to be used to manipulate others, but that it almost inevitably results in self-manipulation. This is why Rusk's advocacy of role-playing and President Johnson's puzzlement that any citizen would "feel toward his country in a way that is not consistent with the national interest" reveal a profoundly defective conception of the nature of democratic citizenship.

How does one protect himself against the ideological contaminations described? The short answer is, "not possible." But if complete freedom

is out of the question, one can still progressively push back the boundaries of ideological bondage by acquiring the habit of reason and of Socratic self-examination; that is, by a life-long educational experience that embodies precisely the features of the liberal conception of education previously described. For if one is going to be ideological in any event, the rational thing to do is to recognize it in order both to reduce its power of contamination, and to exploit its possibilities—a much more sensible thing to do than to conduct spurious and self-deceiving polemics against ideological thinking.

And this brings me to the most basic objection one can make to the politics of pseudo-realism. Up to this point the assumption that politics is an amoral enterprise has not been challenged in detail. But the very fact that for most of us moral considerations are embodied in the ideological perspectives that shape even our judgments of fact implies that it is “unrealistic” to suppose that politics ever could be completely amoral. Still, the realist might insist that one should be as amoral as possible; that, so to speak, he should engage in strenuous moral exercise on Sunday morning, but during political hours, he should engage in strenuous amoral exercise.

The first thing that is wrong with this counsel is that it is schizophrenic, resulting in a destructive lack of authenticity. Even if it were possible, it would be painfully inconvenient. A person cannot be moral in one sphere and amoral in another without becoming self-alienated. For this reason alone, the suggestion is profoundly illiberal in spirit and application. It destroys the possibility of the ideal that lies at the heart of liberalism: self-development.

Beyond this consideration, the idea that moral principles are irrelevant to the assessment of the means to desirable ends is morally vicious. It is moral Stalinism—the view that considerations of justice are irrelevant to the means adopted. There may be times when the ends pursued are of such overwhelming importance that considerations of justice may legitimately be overridden—for example, a situation in which national survival is literally at stake. But even in such a case, the principles of justice are relevant, and must *be overridden*. In most ordinary political contexts, the desirable aim does not have such supervening importance. For example, there are those who do not hesitate to rally Negroes to a civil rights cause by manipulating them, “for their own good,” with lies and racial rhetoric. In so doing, the manipulator simply subjects to indignity those he professes to rescue from indignity. For, more than anything else, the respect due others requires respect for powers of mind and spirit.

In the making of foreign policy, the idea that morality is irrelevant is more complex because it has a certain Hobbesian plausibility. The Hobbesian view is that as politically sovereign societies are not governed by laws, they exist in "a state of nature" that precludes morality because it is psychologically impossible for persons to act morally. There are, as a friend once put it, few "wanderers among nations." Therefore, the ultimate test of the propriety of policy is its contribution to national interest.

The argument is unsound, however, for two reasons. First, the conception of "national interest" is a blank check upon which one inscribes any interest, including moral interests, that are important. Therefore, foreign policy is going to be controlled by ideological considerations in any event. But second, even granting that wanderers among nations are not plentiful, they do occur—and the aim of liberal policy should be to increase their number. Here, if anywhere, James's claim that what is possible is a function of what is believed to be possible has decisive application.

The foregoing analysis makes it easy to understand why the liberal realist tends to favor an exclusively countervailing conception of democracy. He aims to get things done—to be effective. He wants the facts about how one gets things done. The facts confirm what the emphasis on effectiveness suggests—that gaining and managing power is the central problem of political life. The amoral character of the realist's judgment reinforces what exclusive preoccupation with power encourages—a dulling of one's concern about the quality of the process by which power is secured and managed.

The liberal realist favors political democracy over all competing systems for three reasons: it is the process which most efficaciously secures social stability, the general welfare, and human rights. (Note: liberal realists who are deeply concerned about securing human rights as a policy objective are often too quick to violate them in the process if that is what effective action requires.)

The emphasis on stability and general welfare are interdependent. Stability is achieved through a process by which the maximum number of human preferences are satisfied. But through satisfaction of preferences general welfare is cumulatively secured. It is no accident, therefore, that the most influential theorists of the countervailing power conception of democracy in recent years have been economists—particularly Joseph Schumpeter. For the countervailing conception of democracy is modeled on the economists' market-place. It is a process whereby the voter (the consumer) shops around for the commodities (candidates and policies)

that best satisfy his preferences (interests). By giving his business to one firm (political party) rather than to its competitors, he enables that firm better to gain profit (office, patronage, status) and power. The competing firms try to induce consumers to stop buying the competitor's products, and to buy their own. This they may do by offering different products which they claim to be of higher quality, by inventing new products (new policies), or by lowering the price they charge for the same products (lowering taxes). This competitive process is very practical; very realistic; very amoral. But, as in any market-economy, there are many competitive frictions. These exact a long-term moral and aesthetic cost which is unanticipated and enormous. Most importantly, the process is intrinsically destructive of rights and of the opportunities to develop the capacities for good citizenship in the most liberal sense of that expression.

The "realism" of the market is buttressed by a "realistic" assessment of human nature. The countervailing power theorist may, like Schumpeter, claim that it is the best way to counteract man's irrational tendencies. Or, like Reinhold Niebuhr, he may proclaim that man is born in sin, and that the countervailing power process is the surest antidote to original depravity.

All the criticisms of pseudo-realism already developed apply to exclusive reliance on a democracy of countervailing power. Preoccupation with power is ideologically influenced. The democratic process prescribed is immoral because it squanders human rights and potentialities. It is self-defeating because it undermines the very conditions of deliberative citizenship. It is unrealistic because it is the worst possible way to ensure that political leadership will have the "managerial skills" necessary to function most effectively in pursuit of liberal aims. But basically, its pessimistic cast is self-fulfilling. By diminishing liberalism's political reach, it forfeits many liberal aims that are within liberalism's grasp. In the end, Freud's principle fully applies to those who place exclusive reliance on the countervailing power conception. Each such individual is governed by deep-rooted internal prejudices into whose hands his practicality unwittingly plays.

#### **IV. The Politics of Self-Indulgence**

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. attributes the Bay of Pigs disaster partly to the fact that President Kennedy's liberal advisors were trying desperately to prove that they were really tough guys, and not soft-headed idealists.\* What does an authentic liberal do when liberalism is perverted in this

---

\**A Thousand Days*, p. 256.



way by powerful men who are regarded as liberals? What does he do once he fully acknowledges the enormous gap between the promises of American rhetoric and the reality of American society? What does he do when it becomes obvious that many who talk in the idiom of "political effectiveness" are really trying to disguise self-serving pursuit of personal ambition? What does he do in order to avoid absorption by the agencies of "the Establishment" that seem to know how to defer to the existing structures of power better than to anything else? One thing he may do is purchase immunity from the sickness of pseudo-realism by forgoing any prospect of effective political action. He can repudiate the system that breeds and sustains the evils he despises. Unfortunately, in rejecting the system he also forfeits access to institutional resources which he must control if liberal ideals are to be effectively pursued. Thus, he sacrifices the prospects of political success for the sake of his soul. He practices the politics of self-indulgence.

When one prominent liberal, sickened by the Administration's Vietnam policy, decided to resign from the Democratic party, he justified himself in the following terms:

The major issue in most of the criticisms of my letter to the President has been whether leaving the Democratic party makes political sense.

Of course it does not. Anyone wanting to exert maximum political leverage would stay in the party, organize dissenting precinct leaders and district leaders, and see that their protest appeared in newspaper columns and advertisement and, if possible, on the desk of the President himself. This is the kind of politics to which the President responds. *If I were of a different temperament I would have done just that.* [My emphasis.]\*

What interests me here is not the action itself: in balance, it may have been the right thing to do. What interests me is this liberal's implicit assumption that the indulgence of his peculiar temperament is a justification *in itself*. Others go a bit farther. They proclaim that their predominant concern is to achieve "personal authenticity." They also condemn as "finks" liberals who refuse to participate in their projects of protest when those projects seem ineffective or counter-productive. But—and this is my central point—between "finkdom" and violent revolution there may be only the career of noisy impotence, despair, and eventual absorption by the hated "establishment."

Many of those who practice the politics of self-indulgence are young men and women who join "the Movement" and thereby become members of the "New Left." Not all of those who act self-indulgently are to be found in the Movement; nor do all members of that movement prac-

---

\*W. H. Ferry, "The Brutalization of Violence," *Liberation*, October 1965.

tice the politics of self-indulgence. I am abstracting a recognizable tendency that expresses itself to a significant extent in the political activity of many American liberals. They may not call themselves "liberals," nor even think of themselves as liberals. But they are committed to liberal ideals as I have described them; and that is what counts. In a brilliant essay, Irving Howe described those who practice the politics of self-indulgence as making "of their radicalism not a politics of common action, which would require the inclusion of saints, sinners, and ordinary folk, but rather a gesture of moral rectitude."\* Much of what I have to say recapitulates Howe's argument; but it is important to view this form of political life from the perspective of radical-liberalism.

Those who practice the politics of self-indulgence are the moral victims of the dialectic of disorder. Many are Negroes whose souls are sickened by the sand-bagging moderation that passes for responsible citizenship. Many come from middle-class backgrounds where they have been daily witnesses to the corrupting insincerity of the lives led by their parents. Most have been subjected to what passes for education in our multiversities. All are fed up with the self-deception and hypocrisy of those who practice pseudo-realism.

They are properly suspicious of people who talk in the idiom of effectiveness—for the stress on effectiveness is too often a cover for the comforts of quiescence and the preoccupation with a pursuit of successful careers. They refuse to succumb to red-baiting, and are rightly contemptuous of those who try to dismiss them by labelling them "Stalinoid."

They despise Stalinism and all its works. Which is, indeed, why they react with moral outrage to the double standard of those liberal realists who advocate the defense of "freedom" by means that are often not very different from those Stalin employed in Russia. (Yet they, too, often slip into Stalinist grooves when they proclaim their admiration for revolutionary excesses on the grounds that revolution does not, after all, occur "in a velvet box"—a point developed subsequently.)

They are appalled by the failures and distortions of democracy in this country. They are deeply committed to the proposition that those who are vitally affected by large decisions have a right to participate in making those decisions in ways more meaningful than an occasional vote. And so they advocate a democracy of participation, hearkening back to the Jeffersonian tradition of direct participation that has existed since the birth of the Republic as an unrealized part of the rhetoric of Americanism while the Madisonian tradition of coalition politics has

---

\* "New Styles in Leftism," *DISSENT*, Summer 1965.

triumphed. So, also, they move into the ghettos, the slums, and the rural areas of the South, to work directly with those who have been bypassed by American affluence. Their aspiration is to induce those with whom they work to take firmer control of their own destinies so that the tides of modernity will no longer pass over or engulf them.

Oppressed by the pervasive hypocrisy of American society, smothered by the institutional acquisitiveness of established interests, tyrannized by the benevolent paternalism of academic administrators; dirtied by the philistinism and ugliness of the prevailing American culture (how much better to be dirty on the outside and clean on the inside, then the reverse); stultified by the mindlessness of the realists who purvey what passes for social wisdom; oppressed by the manipulateness of those who pursue the Great Society; they are propelled into a desperate pursuit of authenticity that requires, for the younger radicals, generational mistrust. The worst cut of all is that private virtue, an exemplary life of absolute middle-class integrity, is not only consistent with, but often the very vehicle of public vice.

Their search takes them out of the mainstream and into the murkier tributaries of American life. Hence, many try to find their freedom in practices that shock conventional morality; in sexual abandon, filthy speech, LSD and marijuana clubs; beards and dirt; but also in song, poetry, and art; in the theatre of the absurd, as if its absurdity could mitigate the absurdity of their own lives; but, more than anything else, in political action and protest. For if there are dragons to be slain, one has to go to where the action is. This, at least, is what they have learned since the era of Salinger. Those liberals who currently use the "Beatniks" and the "Veatniks" as whipping posts should remember that those they abuse are not just talking freedom; they are trying to live freely.

The civil rights struggle provided a remarkable opportunity to combine the search for authenticity with effective acts of protest. For a variety of reasons, direct action has proved to be an immensely successful means of forcing the pace and nature of civil rights reform. The relative clarity of the moral issues, the large proportion of the population directly involved, the vulnerability of local officials, the exclusion of Southern Negroes from even a formal role in the governing processes, the unconstitutionality of many state and local statutes, the extent to which the civil rights movement has been able to neutralize the Communist issue—all these factors have combined to enable those most committed to less conventional forms of political action to achieve significant success. Unfortunately, the same set of favorable circumstances that has made it possible to be both "authentic" and effective in the fight for

civil rights does not occur in every sphere in which the struggle for social justice is carried on—and is, perhaps, disappearing fast even in civil rights. The casual ways in which civil rights tactics have been employed in opposing American foreign policies have, in balance, especially retarded the effort to force liberal change—a point I will develop in more detail in the final section of this essay.

Although the strength of their feelings, the legitimacy of their moral concerns, and their desire to do something effective should lead them to vigorous intervention in the normal political process, many members of “the Movement” have grown impatient with the calculations and compromises that effective participation in that process imposes. They are, as I have said, too often concerned more with the state of their souls than with the preferences and welfare of those they aim to help. They are too often unwilling to act in ways they regard as inauthentic for the sake of a greater prospect of definite results.

Their acts are self-indulgent first, because even if loss of authenticity were the inevitable result of the calculation and compromise that effective action requires, damage to one’s self ought to be balanced against the resulting sacrifices imposed on others. For the middle-class children of middle-class parents have somewhere else to go if they fail. But where do the oppressed of Vietnam or the inhabitants of Tent City in Lowndes County, Alabama, have to go? Too often the well-educated scions of prosperous families are prepared to fight for human rights to the last indigent before beating their perilous way back to lucrative professional careers.

Second, the politics described is self-indulgent because the definition of authenticity endorsed is spurious. The notion that authenticity requires that one forgo calculation and compromise is perverse. I have many reasons for claiming that this is so.

First, many of those who justify their actions on grounds of personal authenticity mask their ineffectiveness, even from themselves, by adopting Leninist rhetoric without participating in Leninist revolutionary aims—and I mean *violent* revolution. They subject the system they repudiate to an abusive, hammer attack that inspires the converted and alienates everyone else. Hence, like those liberals they so bitterly criticize, members of the Movement create a gap between their own rhetoric and their social reality. To the extent that this is so, they are at least as insincere as those they condemn. Worse—they are ineffectual.

Given this basic insincerity, they could close the gap by becoming revolutionary in fact, as well as in word. But they won’t. They are too middle-class in sentiment and aspiration. They have too much bourgeois

ideology in their system. Their very disaffection is proof of the fact—for it is a disaffection rooted in their serious acceptance of liberal ideals. Nor is their commitment to bourgeois values a fault. For the test of the validity of any value is not its social origin. If certain bourgeois values are also the values of a civilized humanism, then let us make the most of them. Failure to make this discrimination is an intellectual fault.

Moreover, they know very well that revolution would not only fail, but the attempt would cause incalculably more harm than good. For all its defects, American society is progressive in the perspective of history. Emanuel Geltman and Stanley Plastrik put the point precisely:

Legislation must be implemented by enforcement and education. Meanwhile we must distinguish between what we have lost and what we have won, and that means learning to recognize what we have won. Inadequate as much of the legislation seems, our perception of its inadequacy rests upon the advances which it embodies. It is downright silly to maintain that nothing has been achieved. Who will tell that to an auto worker who remembers the Ford plant thirty years ago? Or Mrs. Parks?\*

It is not only what has been won that counts. What has been won is due to the genius with which America's powerful and privileged elites have, since the Civil War, been able to buy off discontent through peripheral remedy of grievances. Yet enough peripheral movement equals substantial social change. This is but the reflection in institutional development of coalition politics at work. The fact that an overwhelming majority of Americans prefer what they have, with all its defects, to what revolution would bring is not only the curse but the triumph of the American system so ingeniously designed by James Madison and his cohorts more than two centuries ago. Members of the Movement may not be willing to say it. But that does not matter. The fact is, *they know it*. And so they insincerely draw back from their rhetoric without yet being able to accept their reality.

But there is an area in which they can match deed to rhetoric—in foreign policy. For it is not they who must make the revolution in Cuba, South Africa, or Vietnam. And so they can and do proclaim the ideals of liberal humanism and at the same time proclaim, as did one SDS leader, that “revolutions do not take place in velvet boxes.” In this way they try to answer those liberal critics who refuse to condone the terror and the tyranny that oppressed people or the elites who lead them perpetrate in trying to rid themselves of their chains. Or they persuasively define the word “terror” and proclaim that the terror committed is all our own. But this is only to abuse both mind and sensibility. For

---

\*“The Politics of Coalition,” *The Radical Papers*, p. 375.

they resort to *non sequitur* in a demagogic effort to win more support for a cause than the cause morally deserves.

The inauthenticity of members of "the Movement" is evidenced in still another way. They rely for support on the "finks" they abuse. And they usually get the support that saves them from their folly. But when that support is not enough to prevent penalty, they are inappropriately shocked and dismayed—"inappropriately," because if they believed what they say when they abuse the "finks," they should find support astonishing, and its failure only to be expected. When they succeed in gaining effective support from liberal "finks," they like to think that it is the result of clever manipulations. It is inconceivable to them that those who defend their rights act out of genuine moral commitment rather than bad conscience. (At that, even bad conscience reflects commitment—if less than the "pure" motivation to which many members of the Movement aspire.)

Which brings me to still another form of inauthenticity. The very persons, who proclaim their absolute and undying commitment to a non-manipulative democracy of participation, too often employ the opportunities such a system affords in manipulative and undemocratic ways. Charismatic leaders declare charisma non-existent—but, all the same, use it to gain their ends. Like the mentors they despise, they profess what they do not practice. Here again, the defect is one of intellect—in two respects. They confuse mere involvement with a democracy of participation by means of which the growth of powers of mind and spirit are encouraged. And they lack the power to discriminate when they fall short in their own conduct of their own ideal aspiration.

Finally, it must be said that some who justify their predilection for dramatic protest in terms of authenticity are really masking from themselves their unwillingness to commit themselves to sustained political involvement. A dramatic flare-up involves a major commitment for a *limited period*. Thus conscience can be appeased at little cost in time and effort. This is both spiritually uplifting and comfortable if one has ambitions that pull in other directions.

But most of those who practice the politics of self-indulgence are at the other extreme. They have a capacity for sustained political involvement that does not normally need to be reinforced by the more conventional political rewards—power and prestige, office and income. This energy for work is in rather scarce supply in this country. When it occurs, it is to be valued—no matter how it happens to be packaged. For the indispensable condition of achievement is, under any and all conditions, the willingness to work.

Moreover, it is impossible to deny that those who are willing to give unstintingly also make other contributions. They are often the initiators of action. They have a political rhetoric of their own which generates new aspirations, new frustrations, new and creative forms of political movement and public policy. From their ranks emerge the poets, and the martyrs of change. Their very passion for authenticity, however defectively expressed in specific situations, is a model and an inspiration.

But to be an inspiration is one thing; to be effective in the long run, quite another. For that kind of success, something more substantial than moral passion, romantic exuberance, and unstinting effort is required. What is needed is a new breed of indefatigable radicals, passionately moral, yes—but also coldly calculating and unfailingly energetic in pursuit of liberal goals. As John Fisher has recently put it: “What this country needs is radicals who will stay that way—regardless of the creeping years, the inevitable blunders, defeats, and combat fatigue.”\* Will the young men and women of “the Movement” pass that test? Not unless they come to realize that they are destined to despair—and that that despair will turn to quiescence or be converted into Madison Avenue cynicism and ambition—unless they acquire disciplines of reason in the same measure that they already possess moral concern.

### **V. The Alternative: The Politics of Radical Pressure**

Radical-liberals have two fundamental tasks: to translate their theoretical principles and aims into concrete programs, and to develop a strategic concept that has as many of the strengths and as few of the weaknesses of the two deranged political styles as possible. In this section I undertake to define the second of these tasks.

It is not enough to be concerned only with the effectiveness of a strategy. A political process is not just a means of implementing political programs. The process itself has an impact on participants that may speed or retard achievement of the values liberals cherish. The central claim of John Dewey's philosophy was that the democratic process could enrich the lives of men, not only by what it does *for* them, but by what it does *to* them. In the following passage from his book, *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey expresses the point with prophetic eloquence:

We have but touched lightly and in passing upon the conditions which must be fulfilled if the Great Society is to become a Great Community; a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying conse-

---

\**Harper's Magazine*, March 1966, p. 28.

quences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being. The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid, and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. When the machine age has thus perfected its machinery it will be a means of life and not its despotic master. Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.

The point crystallized by Dewey's remarks is that an adequate conception of liberal strategy must be based on an adequate conception of liberal democracy. Effective pursuit of legislative programs is normally purchased at a price higher than liberals need to pay if the political processes adopted do little to improve in mind and spirit those who participate and those who are affected; if the accepted conception of democracy does not promote the fullest possible range of liberal values.

The set of values that democracy ought to promote has been an issue on which many of the arguments in preceding sections have turned. I want now to tie the threads of those discussions together; and by describing six functions democracy ought to serve, to provide a theoretical solvent for the two contrasting conceptions of democracy—participatory and countervailing power democracy—that figure so importantly in current debate among liberals.

i. Democracy should reinforce the stabilizing institutions of a society. There are times in the life of a society when the imperatives of order must be rejected in favor of violent revolution. But normally democracy functions as a means of expressing grievances and interests in ways that reduce the general level of discontent, and thereby diminish pressures for redress of grievance through the use of force. This is the first and minimal goal of democratic organization—but, for that very reason, the least distinctive of its functions. The concern for stability is a social virtue only to the extent that it facilitates definite and substantial progress toward liberal goals; not when it is a thinly disguised excuse for sand-bagging realistic pursuit of those ends.

ii. One of these goals is the protection of rights. A democratic system should be organized so that freedoms essential to equal development of human potentialities are securely protected. No other tradition has been as steady and relentless in its *theoretical* repudiation of tyrannical power. But, for that very reason, the gap between liberal theory and liberal practice is a special disaster.



iii. Generally the maintenance of order and the protection of rights requires that human preferences be satisfied. In this way a sufficient number of grievances are eliminated before distress reaches dangerous proportions. The satisfaction of existing human preferences does not, however, always promote the conditions of personal self-development. For men do not always know what is best for them. Yet, if vulgar democrats mistakenly suppose that the voice of the people is the voice of God, the mistake that theorists of aristocracy or meritocracy make is in supposing that anyone else can be given power undemocratically because he is presumed to know better. First, it is notoriously difficult to establish criteria for such knowledge. Second, who can better guarantee that a leader who has the knowledge will use it wisely except the people who must suffer or enjoy the consequences of his social policies? But subjection of leadership to the will of the people implies that satisfaction of existing preferences will generally be pursued. For these reasons, the promotion of general welfare through satisfaction of existing preferences is, with all its dangers, an essential goal of liberalism—and an important function of democracy.

iv. One of the special rights liberals cherish is the freedom of persons to participate in the making of those social policies that vitally affect their destinies. In this respect there is not even a theoretical alternative to democratic process. The satisfaction of this function should be an intrinsic virtue of that process.

v. Intimately related to the right of participation is the liberal concern that the virtues of responsible citizenship be developed in the largest possible number of people. This primarily means that the citizen's respect for the traditions of reason and for his own capacities should be encouraged. Democracy is defective to the extent that it is not constituted by processes that serve this function. If, as Dewey claimed, a by-product is "enriching communion," all the better.

vi. Wise political leadership is an essential condition of right policy in any and all conditions. The central mistake of anti-democratic theorists is not their stress on the importance of leadership, but their belief that effective leadership requires dictatorial or total power. The liberal insists that good leadership is at least as much a matter of being able to influence the course of events through reasoned persuasion as it is the shaping of destinies by manipulating people and power. Effective leadership depends at least as much on the kind of sensitivity to human needs and preferences produced by the processes of direct and mutually respectful involvement with those led as it does upon technical expertise.

Against the background of this catalogue of the functions of democ-

racy, the conflict, though not the tension, between the theorists of a countervailing, or coalition conception of democracy, and the theorists of a democracy of participation, disappears. For *both* are essential, but in different functional respects. This is what I aim to show in this section.

James Madison was the great theorist of a democracy of countervailing coalitions. Never in history has an emerging institutional process conformed as closely to design as the American political process has to the system he envisioned, especially in his *Federalist Paper #10*. Jean Jacques Rousseau, though less prophetic, holds a similar place of pride among theorists of participatory democracy.

In his book, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau held that only in a small-scale democracy of participation can both justice and rational public policy be secured. In particular, he believed that once a society adopts a representative system of government, one may "give over the state for lost." Madison argued that Rousseau's form of "pure democracy" will inevitably degenerate into anarchy and tyranny; that only a system of countervailing coalitions buttressed by what he called "auxiliary precautions" can protect individual rights, especially property rights, and maintain social stability.

In the argument that follows I try to show, by means of a dialectical modification of both the Madisonian and Rousseauian positions, how one can arrive at a view that satisfies the six functional requirements stated previously; a conception of democracy that promotes the fullest range of liberal values by encouraging creative tension between the processes the two men advocated.

A Madisonian might initially insist that the Rousseauian is a romantic, and somewhat reactionary, visionary. He might claim that the possibility of small-scale democracies of participation ended when industrialization made city-states the size of Athens and Geneva impossible. The Rousseauian, he might claim, talks in the idiom of the radical, but in fact fights modernity. The only thing direct democracy will ever bring about is anarchy and consequent tyranny. It is not, he might continue, even necessary to retell Thucydides' story. Consider what happened to the industrial Soviets established during the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution. It didn't take Lenin very long to realize that, contrary to what Marx prophesied and what Lenin himself hoped for, this experiment in participatory democracy was a disaster. He might claim that Lenin's misbegotten experiment paved the way for Stalinist tyranny. "Be realistic," he might urge. "Work within the framework of coalition politics that has proved, not perfect, but the best political process human beings have been able to devise."

The Rousseauian could reasonably admit that *The Social Contract* cannot be applied as it was written. Too much has happened since the middle of the 18th century. But, he might go on to deny that Rousseau's central assumptions, suitably applied to modern industrial conditions, are irrelevant or unimportant. Rousseau, it is true, was wrong to claim that, once representative institutions are permitted, the state is lost. Nevertheless, unless a system of coalition politics is invigorated by participatory institutions, important values are needlessly forfeited, the prospect of urgently needed radical reform is destroyed and, equally important, the prospect of improving the quality of the processes of coalition politics is severely limited.

To this the Madisonian might reply that the only system that can insure stable social conditions, provide adequate protection against tyrannical abuse of human rights, and maximize social welfare is a politics of countervailing power. By dispersing power through a nation vast in population and geographic extent, and by guaranteeing to a sufficiently large portion of that population the vote, the ruling coalitions that emerge are rendered inherently unstable. Frequent elections give the "outs" an opportunity to attract, by means of new programs, the factions peripheral to the ruling coalition. Auxiliary protections like the Supreme Court and the federal system itself provide additional brakes on tyrannical abuse of power. Each faction will associate itself with others for limited purposes of mutual benefit. When the particular purposes of any of these factions are achieved, they will go fishing in different political waters. Except for the Civil War, which was due to the rigidities created by the "peculiar institution" of slavery and the unnatural economic homogeneity of different regions of the country, the system has worked well as a means of maintaining stability, and tolerably well as a barrier to violation of human rights.

The Rousseauian could retort that the Madisonian has missed his point. He no longer denies the strengths imputed to the Madisonian system; but the Madisonian should not, in turn, overlook the intrinsic value as well as the necessary corrective supplied by participatory democracy. Most Madisonians, being economically well off and high in status, rarely calculate the human price that is paid for the kind of stability and progress they cherish. The total product may be increasing, but it is not being distributed equally. General welfare is not equal welfare. The fact that almost a third of the people of the United States hardly participate in our vaunted affluence is not a historical accident, but is due to the system's chronic defects. Political leadership is almost all drawn from the prosperous classes. Madison thought that wealthy people would be

more likely than others to be men of light and learning. But his assumption has proved to be a piece of class prejudice. Some rights are, from the Madisonian point of view, more equal than others—particularly property rights. And this is not acceptable to a radical-liberal. Moreover, consider the gratingly slow processes by which grievances are remedied in a Madisonian system. This can be mitigated by more intimate decision-making structures. Even granting that the system of countervailing coalitions is, in balance, an engine for progress—one must consider the frictional factors that grind living people down. The Madisonian is too inclined to tolerate almost any human price for stability and protection of property rights—provided it is “only” those most oppressed by the system who are required to pay that price. The high casualty rates among Negroes in our “defense of freedom” in Vietnam is just the latest and most dramatic example of what this means in human terms. But worst of all is the way in which the Madisonian system causes policy to gravitate toward a political consensus based on accidental configurations of factional interests rather than reason and morality.

The man in the White House says, “Come let us reason together.” But radical-liberals know that too often he really means, “Come, let me manipulate you.” Increasingly, powerful leaders work their will by relying on the manipulative arts and the mindlessness of citizens and legislators. A democracy of participation would be one way, perhaps the most important, in which a broader spectrum of the population can be educated in the virtues of responsible citizenship, and thus inoculated against the unreason of the manipulators. At the same time, it will make more likely the emergence of political leadership from a strata of the population who presently depend too often upon the patricians of American politics to fight their political battles. But beyond both these advantages, ordinary people simply have the right to participate more fully in the policy decisions that vitally affect their lives.

The Madisonian might shift his ground a bit, and accuse the Rousseauian of endorsing what Bayard Rustin has called a “no-win tendency.” In his article “From Protest to Politics?”\* Rustin wrote:

My quarrel with the “no-win” tendency in the civil rights movement [Rustin would have the same quarrel with the ‘no-win’ tendencies on the “New Left” generally] parallels my quarrel with the moderates outside the movement. As the latter lack the vision or will for fundamental change, the former lack a realistic strategy for achieving it. For such a strategy they substitute militancy. But militancy is a matter of posture and volume, not of effect.

---

\*Reprinted in *The Radical Papers*, p. 342.

His conclusion is based on recognition that "the Negro today finds himself stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before: automation, urban decay, *de facto* school segregation." He argues that these defects are much more deeply rooted in our socio-economic order than the legal props to segregation. They are the result of a total societal failure to meet, not just the needs of Negroes, but human needs generally.

Now how do you cope with these larger problems effectively, except by finding allies among others who either oppose the system or who, because they are injured by it, are potential opponents? A coalition of Negroes, liberals, students, labor, migrant farmers, Mexicans, poor "white trash," Puerto Ricans, and anyone else who does not or should not like the way things are, organized in mutually advantageous ways, stands some prospect of success. In other words Rustin advocates that the political resources of the existing Madisonian system be used as effectively as possible. Though it may be personally satisfying to indulge one's preference for acts of direct political involvement—whether building structures of communal participation or protest—to do this to the exclusion of participation in coalition politics will be self-defeating in the long run.

Unless one is self-deceived by revolutionary rhetoric, it is impossible to deny the cogency of Rustin's argument. The Rousseauian may admit as much; yet he may also deny any suggestion that Rustin's position either precludes or makes unimportant efforts to create participatory institutions. (Nor does Rustin suppose otherwise.)

For, though interested in a "win" policy as much as Rustin, the Rousseauian would want to make sure that our definition of what it is to "win" is not restricted to the implementation of a legislative program. There are things that the very process of *trying to win* can do to people. If they participate in an increasingly deliberative process, they can develop their powers of mind and spirit.\* And, as suggested before, unless such a process is encouraged, the prospects of winning even legislative reform are impaired.

A citizenry involved is more likely to become interested and politically motivated than persons who are encouraged only to cast a biennial vote. By being thrown into situations in which they must think, not just about the relative merits of candidates, but about the policies themselves, they are more likely to acquire the knowledge, the sense of relevance, and the skills of the mind to persist more resolutely and more thought-

---

\*To some extent this is what concerns the young militants of SNCC. Acutely aware that Negroes of the black belt have been deprived of self-confidence and self-esteem by their virtual bondage, SNCC views participation as an important remedy. They regard coalition politics as a means of perpetuating spiritual entrapment.

fully in the fight for programs that will be more than a welfare-tinted anodyne for distress caused by massive need. And they will be more likely to produce a leadership from their own ranks that cannot be bought off.

Rustin's argument is correct as far as it goes—but it doesn't go far enough. Coalition politics can be effective without being as effective as possible.

At this point the Madisonian should be prepared to concede a great deal to the Rousseauian. He would, if he is honest and liberal, have to concede that, for many Americans, things have worked out badly. He would also have to admit that he was wrong in stressing stability and the protection of rights, especially property rights, to the exclusion of so much else. But he may still be distressed by the Rousseauian's tendency to think of the countervailing form of coalition politics solely in terms of effectiveness, reserving all the *moral* virtues for participatory democracy. Even from the Rousseauian's point of view, the system of coalition politics has some advantages that go beyond the question of mere effectiveness.

For one thing, it provides a larger framework of forces and interests that inhibits the provincialism and factionalism that so often contaminate deliberations within more intimately organized political structures.

For another, whatever is achieved through the politics of countervailing power promotes the values that result from participatory democracy by strengthening the motive to participate. Romantic exuberance is fine, but unless it is sustained by occasional success at the more general policy levels, enthusiasm will soon evaporate. Morale and motive cannot be sustained by the intensity of initial commitment alone.

Moreover, the system of countervailing powers does provide that degree of protection from interference by corporate powers, public and private, that is essential to the functioning of participatory institutions. And it also creates that floor of material benefits that the maligned welfare state affords; and without which a democracy of participation will not last for very long. One can, for example, deplore the inadequacies of the Poverty Program, but it is indirectly subsidizing a lot of the activity that the Rousseauian favors. And, even if this were not so, persons who face the prospect of actual starvation will have neither the time nor the inclination to engage in "participatory deliberations."

Finally, no matter how much the conservative preoccupation with stability and order is impugned, in a less ideological moment the Rousseauian will have to admit that a degree of stability and order are conditions without which the growth of a deliberative democracy of participation would be an impossibility.

But it is important to be clear that stability and order are to be understood in a way that permits political conflict, dissent, protest, and radical change. They are, by implication, to be understood in a way that makes them compatible with forms of political action that conservatives, quick on the verbal draw, are inclined to regard as “disorderly processes.” Above all, the stabilizing processes of a society should not only permit, but should actively encourage reasoned scrutiny and criticism of its most sacred institutions and beliefs. An unexamined society may be worth living in; but the constraints it imposes are hardly worthy of those who proclaim that they are free men in a free society. And the protection of “sacred institutions and beliefs” too often becomes a flimsy self-serving mask for the protection of existing structures of power and prerogative.

At this point the fundamental opposition between the two positions breaks down. The Madisonian and the Rousseauian may arrive at a limited agreement. The latter claims that coalition politics without participatory democracy tends to be irresponsible, manipulative, and class dominated. The former claims that participatory democracy without coalition politics tends to be provincial, factional, and lacking in necessary political and material props—i.e., stability, welfare, and a framework of protected rights. They are both right. In the final analysis, the two institutional processes are essential to one another because in important respects, they complement and reinforce one another. This is so even though in other respects there is, and always must be, unresolved tension between them.

The general case for participatory institutions is strengthened by relating the point about the mutual interdependence of the two processes to an old liberal perplexity. Just what attitude ought a liberal democrat to take toward underdeveloped societies that do not permit full freedom of political opposition?

In a previous section I observed that liberal theorists have generally acknowledged that there exist cultural and industrial prerequisites for a formal democracy of countervailing power. But liberal theories of democracy have rarely proposed definite criteria on the basis of which one could assess the extent to which democratization of these societies had been achieved, nor liberal guidelines for determining how to rub out deficiencies that impede progress toward political democracy. By and large, liberals have tended to echo the conventional response—that education, industrialization, rule of law, and a few, precariously established, formal freedoms are sufficient evidence of adequate democratization of the society.

These tests tend to be strengthened or relaxed depending on whether

one is militantly anti-Communist or militantly pro-revolutionary. The anti-Communist liberal will apply the democracy test more stringently to "pro-Communist" or revolutionary societies, less stringently to anti-Communist societies. Many radicals, on the other hand, tend to suppose that for societies in the throes of revolutionary ferment industrialization alone will do. Industrialization cannot, after all, take place in a velvet box any more than violent revolution itself. So bloody suppression, not only of organized political opposition, but of speech, press, and other "bourgeois" rights are not always rejected as completely as they should be. For example, I have never been able to understand why someone cannot both view Castroism as progressive in certain industrial and social respects, and as tyrannical and reactionary to the extent that the Castro regime has dismantled the traditional structures of rule of law—especially as the despised legal institutions seemed to have functioned well enough to have enabled Castro himself to escape imprisonment during his earliest period of rebelliousness.

The point is that the conventional criteria are not very satisfactory because they do not enable us to make fine enough discriminations. By the conventional tests alone Russia, for example, would have to be said to be moving more rapidly towards democracy than Pakistan or Egypt. Perhaps this is so; but there is another property of the last two systems that Russia lacks.

Both Pakistan and Egypt have tried to incorporate an element of participatory democracy into their respective social systems. Pakistan has done so roughly on the model of India's experiments in village democracy; Egypt, more or less, on the model of Yugoslavia's experiments with workers' councils. If what I have argued is sound, the development of these growing points for democracy outside the conventional framework of more or less autocratic power should both augur well for the future of political democracy in these countries and, incidentally, yield an important new criterion in terms of which to assess underdeveloped nations that are not democracies in the sense of permitting organized political opposition at all levels of power. Many countries seem, in fact, to be adopting such experiments in one form or another.

Indeed, just to pursue this line of thinking to its domestic conclusion, perhaps what is good for India and Pakistan, Egypt and Yugoslavia is good for Mississippi, Alabama, and even, pardon the unrealistic thought, for New York City.

The Madisonian may not yet be able to shake the conviction that there is something deeply unrealistic about a democracy of participation. There seems to be some overriding obstacle to this form of democracy,



something rooted deeply in the very nature of man and of his institutions—an iron law of organization that decrees that any social *movement* will either be transformed into *organization*, or wither and die. And, as Michels and the other elite theorists argued, there seems further to be an iron law of oligarchy that decrees that, in any organization, pure democracy will inevitably be supplanted by oligarchy. Indeed, some sociologists believe the institutional and psychological forces that make for personal irresponsibility to be so powerful, that they have come to regard widespread apathy as a definite virtue of any social system.

The problems raised by these heroic criticisms will not here be discussed in the sociological and psychological detail required. But, in line with the earlier criticism of the politics of pseudo-realism, this much must be said: After all the marvelously recondite arguments have been adduced by the new pessimists of the social sciences, one may still suspect that their ideological convictions control their “scientific” judgments. The possibilities in political things are not as narrow as one’s interests, fecklessness, and moral preconceptions may make one believe.

Moreover, if for any reason a person does come to believe that it is impossible to achieve even a partial democracy of participation, then that belief will diminish the likelihood that participatory institutions will in fact take root and grow. The Madisonian makes his wish father to his belief; and his beliefs partly create the sociological facts he conveniently predicts when he applies his “Iron Laws.”

But the Rousseauian has an even more crushing response. There is really no need to speculate about these matters. For while skeptics speculate, the possibility of a democracy of participation is being proved by those who believe it to be possible and are acting on that belief. In the urban ghettos of Chicago, Cleveland, and Newark, in the rural ghettos of Alabama and Mississippi, young men and women with a vision are helping to forge new institutions undeterred by the theoretical cautions of their realistic elders. Moreover, the very pressure of need has generated “disorderly” surrogates for socially accepted forms of participation. Sit-ins, lie-ins, teach-ins, protests, civil disobedience, cooperatives, tent cities, Freedom parties, petitions, legal action, poor peoples’ corporations, mass rallies, wildcat strikes, and other social inventions are expressions of the need to participate more directly in the making of policies that vitally affect one’s life. Nor has this proliferation of institutional devices for satisfying a felt need been fruitless. For the rhetoric of left-wing radicalism is being gradually reabsorbed into the rhetoric of American liberalism. Thus, with all its defects, the Poverty Program will have one achievement of historic significance to its credit. By ad-

ministrative rule it requires that the poor, whom its programs are meant to benefit, shall have representation on the boards and committees that are authorized to administer those programs. Already liberals are beginning to think of other ways to apply this principle to the administration of public funds.

No doubt, this rule is honored in the breach. But the important thing is that for the first time in America's modern industrial era the right of participation in a form other than an occasional vote has become part of the rhetoric of public policy, and initiates a new dialectic of disorder. Jeffersonian rhetoric may once again be heard in the conventional agencies of the land. Stodgy officials of planned parenthood associations, private welfare agencies, of legal aid societies, community action committees, educational associations, and of many other groups, private and public, have long and zealously guarded their prerogative to do good for others without being bothered by those lucky recipients of their largesse. Increasingly these officials are forced to respond in some way to the insistent pressure of those who insist on implementation of the policy decreeing participation by the poor. Debate and discussion, conflict and cooperation generate a new unfulfilled aspiration to participate—one that will not be satisfied by an occasional vote for members of a poverty program committee.

And in our colleges and universities, students no longer ask for the right to share in the vital decisions that shape their educational experience—they *demand* it. College administrations are beginning to respond to this demand. At Berkeley and at the University of Michigan steps have been taken. At Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington groans. The only brake on a more accelerated pace of change is that of the students' own fears and insecurities—in large part the product of the pseudo-realism with which their minds and spirits have been contaminated. But there is every prospect that at least the radicals among this generation of students will not be bought off. If they are, it will be primarily because the self-indulgence of their politics brings with it despair and capitulation to the forms of democratically irresponsible power they rightly loathe.

The foregoing analysis points directly to a new politics of radical pressure that synthesizes in mutually reinforcing ways welfare politics, coalition politics, and participatory democracy—a politics of radical pressure which operates on the principle that when one of these three vital constituents of a total liberal strategy is formally absent or defective, everything, short of rebellion, required to provide informal substi-

tutes for them ought to be done—but done *effectively*. Gunnar Myrdal has argued that the creation of participatory institutions lies beyond the welfare state. He is wrong in supposing that the task of reconstructing social and political institutions should wait until the basic tasks of welfare politics have been completed, though he is right in thinking that the life of autonomous mind and spirit requires relief from the insistent pressures of abject biological and economic need. But morally and politically, the development of a more deliberative process of coalition politics, the growth of participatory institutions, and the completion of the welfare state are concomitant enterprises—none more important from a theoretical point of view than any of the others, all three absolutely indispensable conditions of a good American society. (In concrete situations it is, of course, necessary to assign value-priorities. I have no illusion that acceptance of what has just been argued will result in invariable harmony when such assignments are made. My aim has been, rather, to counteract the tendency to focus so exclusively on one value that others are neglected.)

I say “a *new* politics of radical pressure.” But this is misleading. What is really required is recognition of the processes that have proliferated and developed since Rosa Parks decided to keep her bus seat. This is the larger social meaning of the Negro revolution. What is also required is a more deliberate effort to use those processes more effectively in pursuit of radical aims. Sit-ins, Freedom parties, teach-ins, and the like are surrogates for participation in the processes by which public policies are formed and from which those involved in these activities are normally excluded. (Often even from the *pro forma* exercise of the franchise, though this is admittedly in the process of rapid change.) My quarrel is certainly not with the existence or further exploitation of these social inventions. My quarrel is only with the supposition that they can be used effectively in any and all situations of legitimate social discontent. My quarrel is basically with pseudo-realists who eschew such tactics, and only secondarily with those who employ them self-indulgently. Whether tactics outside the frame of more conventional political processes should be adopted is not something that can be decided in general—on the basis of an incantation of ritualistic formulas like, “Protest, not establishment politics,” or “Protest, not debate.”

The strategic concept I am proposing is that of using any device, short of open rebellion or revolution, to bring pressure to bear in support of liberal aims. But in any given situation the specific choice of tactics should be decided on the basis of that which effectively, and over time, tends to enable realization of the many values that a liberal

seeks to foster. There is, from this point of view, simply no general case to be made for adherence to one preferred tactic or another. For there is no substitute for coldly reflective calculation based on knowledge of the concrete situation and comprehensive grasp of the entire range of liberal values we should seek to move toward.\*

It is of central importance that every program advanced by radical liberals be so conceived that as many liberal values as possible are promoted; and, where they already exist, protected. Thus, for example, in advocating an extension of the War on Poverty, the liberal should demand not only that more of the poor be brought under the program, nor only that the poor be permitted representatives on local committees that administer the funds, but that the Poverty Program be used as an instrument for destroying those more conventional welfare programs that practice paternalism and breed servility; and that, wherever possible, it encourages a fuller participation by those the program is designed to benefit—not only in the administration of funds, but in the organization of the poor, in the development of leadership skills, and through giving top priority to experimental programs designed to foster fuller and freer community action.

Let us call the idea that has emerged from the preceding argument “the principle of the promotion of multiple liberal values.” Given this principle, it becomes impossible to run, seriatim, through the list of evils requiring social remedy described in an earlier section. Instead, the programs designed to remedy *any* should, within the limits of possibility, be designed to remedy all.

## **VI. American Liberalism and Foreign Policy**

Viewed from this perspective, what shape might liberal programs take? This is not the place to apply the moral and strategic principles proposed in the foregoing to all of America’s social problems. But I cannot conclude without applying those principles to problems that today generate more confusion and division within liberalism’s ranks than have any others in the past two decades—the problems of foreign policy.

Liberals are divided about U.S. Vietnam policy for a number of reasons. They disagree about the policies that best serve America’s vital interests. They are at odds about the morality of our intervention. They

---

\*Even given these ideal conditions there is a residual source of conflict that should not be overlooked. Two persons who have the same values may yet disagree about their relative importance.

disagree about the nature and threat of Communism and on the efficacy of military intervention as an instrument of American policy.

These differences are not new. They were more modestly expressed during earlier crises—the Korean War, the intervention in Lebanon, the Bay of Pigs adventure, and even the Cuban missile crisis. In the cases of Lebanon and the Bay of Pigs, the issue was whether we had any business at all being there. In the cases of Korea and the missile crisis, liberal disagreement centered on the extent and nature of our intervention.

Though disagreement on what best serves America's national interests appears to be straightforwardly factual, it is certain that judgments made on the basis of the inadequate evidence available to both supporters and critics of Administration policy are deeply affected by "internal prejudices." And moral beliefs are among the most powerful of the "prejudices" that shape such judgments. For example, it is clear that in matters affecting our relations with other nations the bugle call of old-fashioned patriotism is heard much more insistently by Vice President Humphrey than by Senator Fulbright. In domestic policy, Humphrey is no doubt a better liberal than Fulbright. But when confronted by the conflicting claims of a narrow patriotism and liberal morality, Humphrey, more consistently than Fulbright, has tended to dismiss the latter in favor of the former. This conflict between patriotism and morality poses the deepest and most perplexing problems for liberals trying to make judgments about foreign policy.

Most liberals have escaped the full force of the dilemma by being unduly optimistic about the inherent harmony between patriotic and liberal aims. In quiet moments they may question whether America's vital interests are invariably fused with the defense of freedom and democracy around the globe; but in the hurly-burly of public debate, they have not, until recently, found it difficult to convince themselves that America's authentic voice is the voice of Right. Their optimism has been reinforced by the development of nuclear military potential. For the existence of these terrible weapons makes it relatively easy to identify national interest with the peace of the world, and then to suppose that the deployment of national military power is required to preserve that peace. To suppose otherwise encourages appeasement on the model of Munich, and thereby increases the probability of nuclear showdown. Or so the familiar rationale goes.

The self-deception is aided by another factor. Because nations live in a "state of nature," the tendency to dismiss morality as irrelevant to policy seems to be strongest in the case of foreign policy. "We must not

suppose," the amoralist assures us, "that in the absence of supra-national law the claims of individual morality have application." Those who fear collectivism should be made to recognize that the real danger lies in this sort of collectivist abandonment of the strictures of individual morality. In no other area of public life can one have less confidence that professed moral commitments will be honored. Those schooled in the traditions of American Puritanism abandon their morality with remarkable ease when they turn their attention to foreign policy. Of course, they suffer the pangs of conscience for their sins. But the psychic pain is a small price to pay for the opportunity to prove to the powerful, that good guys can be tough guys. Besides, remorse proves a most excellent expiation—a way of readying the spirit for the next sin.

Patriotic passions play a more influential role in foreign than domestic policy because national security seems more obviously involved. President Kennedy used to claim, "Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us." This is true only for the short run. But with so much thought to be at stake it is not hard to understand why the relevance of more general moral concerns seems small.

The mischief encouraged by the view Kennedy held is then compounded by withholding or distorting information vital to rational assessment of foreign policy. The excuse invariably given is that the truth would jeopardize national security. Of course, more often than not, the truth would also embarrass officials.

There is another group of liberals who are very ready to admit that patriotism may conflict with morality—and absolutely repudiate the former. They fancy that in so doing they are being good citizens and striking a blow against chauvinism. But the matter is not so simple. As a liberal, one may reject the claims of patriotism. As an American, he should not; nor, usually, can he. For as Americans we all have special obligations that we owe to other members of the national community. Only a person who *authentically* repudiates the system, and all the benefits it affords, can legitimately claim exemption from these special obligations. Socrates may have exaggerated these obligations when he sipped the hemlock; but he had a point.

The situation is similar to that faced by one who is both a liberal and a parent. As a liberal he is concerned equally about the welfare of every child. But as a parent, he both will and should consider the welfare of his own child in a special way. It is human and it is right to do so. Forced to choose between alternatives that might really harm his child and might really violate his political convictions, the parent has a definite obligation to give special, though not necessarily overriding,

weight to his child's interests. Similarly, as a member of a national community—even one that falls far short of meeting the criteria of John Dewey's Great Community—if an individual more or less “consents” to the existing structure of social institutions, if he accepts its benefits, then he ought to acknowledge that he has some special obligations. (It must be dim acknowledgment of this point that partly accounts for the fact that many adopt the rhetoric, but not the reality, of revolutionary repudiation of American institutions.)

The visceral patriotism that is inculcated from birth is likely to find expression in any event. Too often it is expressed in an inverted form—through acts of dramatic protest that are more of a cry for a beloved country than an outcry against a hated system. It is simply better and more effective to avoid self-delusion, and to come to terms with one's own loyalties. That way one is not so tempted to deal with the hard and complex options of the moral life thoughtlessly—to exaggerate a nation's virtues, or its vices.

Yet reason also requires that the liberal should try to articulate the principles that ought to guide his judgment and action when forced to choose between his liberal commitments and his nation's narrower interests. Simple formulas are not available, but some things can be said.

First, the concern must be for *national* interests—interests that affect every American roughly equally. Too often the expressed concern for our “vital national interests” is nothing but a disguised effort to preserve or enhance one's power and privileges. Liberals should relentlessly expose those who invest the national interest with their own vested interests. Whether or not there is a single power elite, there are surely powerful elites that seek to make of American foreign policy an instrument of corporate aggrandizement. For example, there is little doubt that this country's unwillingness to do more than it does to bring down the viciously racist South African regime is in some part due to the fact that American investors are making profits at the rate of 25 percent per year on their original investments in that brutal land.

Secondly, we should frankly recognize that there may be times when interests are vital without being national; or, worse, times when the nation has embarked on a fateful course without adequate justification. Under these conditions why should we expect or demand that every one share equally in the sacrifices entailed? Let those who participate most in the potential benefits of the enterprise pay the heaviest price. Or let those who favor the enterprise strongly make the necessary sacrifices. At the very least, let us allocate this sacrifice randomly. It is a vicious patriotism that compels those who participate least in American freedom

and affluence to share equally in its defense. It is more vicious when the sacrifice imposed is great—perhaps one's very life. It is yet more vicious when the sacrifice of those who benefit least is greater by far than that imposed on those who benefit most. To permit these things to happen is to make a mockery of the voluntarism that is supposed to be the operative principle of our free society.

The point does have practical application. A selective service system that penalizes the poor, the Negro, and the undereducated for the sin of being born without equal opportunity is a moral outrage. For another example, every time a planned expansion of desirable welfare programs is postponed in order to pay for military adventure, the rights of those in need are violated. (It is time that our liberal leaders acknowledge that failure to expand freedoms through acts of omission is no less a form of tyranny than elimination of freedoms that already exist. Rights can be denied as well as destroyed.)

Third, to the extent that the interests involved are national in the relevant sense, there should be a rough correlation between the importance of these interests and the human cost protecting them requires. It is principally this point that accounts for liberal dissent and division about Vietnam. What the American government has authorized for the sake of dubious interests and commitments is felt by many to be barbaric. Among these people are many who will even concede that American interests are indeed jeopardized. But they maintain that these interests are at best marginal—not remotely important enough to justify the heinousness of our means. The napalming and saturation bombing, the well-documented brain-washing and torture in which we have participated, the reckless misuse of our young combatants to prop a military regime that clearly lacks the support even of the part of the population within the regions still securely held—what is all of this but the moral counterpart of what Stalin and his cohorts did in Russia for the sake of industrial growth? The Stalinist nature of our means cannot begin to be justified by the marginal national interests allegedly being protected by a military policy that is not restrained enough.

Those of us who view matters in this way are simply less inclined than liberals like Vice-President Humphrey to permit patriotism to override morality in the making of foreign policy.

We believe that liberal Administrations have too often tended to purchase immunity from the charge of being radical or socialistic in domestic policy by being especially tough and "amoral" in foreign policy. We know that many who are capable of thinking with fine-grained discrimination about our domestic problems often think in crudely stereo-



typic terms about the nature, interests, and moral claims of people in other lands. Liberals are not the worst offenders—but they are far from being immune to this disease of the moral imagination. There is nothing unusual nor particularly blameworthy about the tendency. With the best will in the world, liberal policy normally requires a subtlety of empirical discrimination that it is virtually impossible to achieve. For such distinctions must normally be drawn against a background of inadequate information and the cultural insensitivity that is bound to affect one born and bred in a very different culture. Americans who go abroad quickly recognize these defects in others. Why should they find it so difficult to understand that the very same cultural insularity is even more likely to characterize Americans themselves? For American culture has had to be even more constraining than most, if only because it has had to shape national character out of incredibly heterogeneous human beings. Ugly Americans are not just a national calamity, they are a human inevitability. “You Americans don’t understand. You are making beggars of our children, prostitutes of our women, and Communists of our men!”—this was the rebuke hurled at a young American soldier by a South Vietnamese teacher when the soldier threw candy on the ground before a swarm of pleading children. The young American was only trying to be friendly.

The general thrust of the foregoing analysis is that, though American liberals cannot be expected to subordinate national interests to the claims of morality on every occasion, they must make sure that these claims are not casually overridden on *any* occasion. The point, though abstract and difficult to apply concretely, is absolutely central. The main function of liberalism, in the conduct of foreign policy is steadily and intelligently to maintain the relevance of liberal morality; to insure that neither ends nor means are fastened on the nation without relentless scrutiny from liberalism’s moral point of view; to affirm that, in the balancing of narrower against wider interests, the latter are normally preeminent. I have tried to indicate how this perspective might be applied to the present Vietnam policy. Taken seriously, these abstract considerations would, for some, mean the difference between support and opposition to U.S. policy—a significant difference.

There are those who regard any stress on the morality of foreign policy as defective—mere “moralism.” Now it is true that great evil has often resulted from appeal to moral principles in the making of American foreign policy. This is so in part because problems of morality often have a surface simplicity that belies the underlying complexity of the factual and moral considerations involved. Thus many refuse the

same sustained effort of intelligence in moral matters that they urge as a matter of course in areas of their technical competence. There are many brilliant technicians in our scientific culture who take a holiday from reason when they address themselves to moral problems—especially whenever questions of priority involving essentially vague concepts such as “national interest,” “justice,” “welfare,” and “human rights” are at issue. But if, in making morality relevant to foreign policy, one tends to be less rigorously empirical, or to use pious moral rhetoric vacuously, or to think in terms of moral absolutes when the available alternatives are different shades of gray, or arrogantly to suppose that the specific institutions of one’s native land provide the best models for every other society, or to suppose that there are no historical prerequisites for progressive change, the fault lies not in the effort to make morality relevant but in the thoughtlessness with which the effort is made. The remedy lies not in abandoning morality, but in embracing rationality. The mark of a truly advanced society is not only or mainly its superior technology, but also the quality of thought and morals that shape decisions of how to deploy the power its technology makes available.

Those in charge of the conduct of American foreign policy are often moralistic. They are too often implacably self-righteous, devoid of compassion. Their self-righteousness and lack of compassion have an epistemological consequence.

For to view the ferment in the underdeveloped nations of the world from the lofty height of a judging deity, effectively screens out the agony that is the daily lot of millions of individual human beings. It incapacitates a person for the task of understanding revolutionary ferment. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., analyzing Dean Rusk’s participation in the Kennedy Administration, commented:

At times one wondered whether the harshness of life—the seething planet of revolutionary violence, ferocity and hate, shadowed by nuclear holocaust—ever penetrated the screen of clichés, ever shook that imperturbable blandness.\*

But Schlesinger errs in supposing that the moral insensitivity of men like Rusk is a personal fault; an accident of temperament. Rather the trait is a chronic disorder resulting from a social milieu that encourages us to view human beings as mere things, instruments of policy in the gigantic clash between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. Beneath the “imperturbable blandness” of men like Rusk is a controlling passion for abstract freedom and abstract democracy as ferocious in its

---

\**Op Cit.*, p. 434.

consequences as the inquisitorial commitment to the Christian brotherhood of man and sovereignty of the one true God.

It is at this point that theorists who view the application of moral principles to the making of foreign policy come back with what they regard as a clinching argument. "Whenever power is used," they say, "certain men use other men as means. This is inherent in the very exercise of power. In the conduct of foreign policy, power must be used; sin cannot, therefore, be avoided." The argument is simpleminded. The authority to whom appeal is usually made by such "realists" is Kant. But Kant claimed something different. He wrote: "Treat every rational being, including yourself, always as an end and never as a *mere* means." (My italics.) It is simply a *non sequitur* to claim that this dictum implies that men are never to be treated as means to some end. All it proscribes is that this never be the whole of the treatment they are accorded. What Kant's authority suggests, the common sense of morality confirms. Those who exercise power do not inevitably sin. Whether the use of a person as a means is or is not immoral depends on two factors: Are his claims as a human being as fully respected as they should? Are the ends pursued morally worthy? No doubt, it is not easy to decide in particular situations. But if rape is likely, try to avoid it instead of moaning about man's depravity.

It is precisely because American statesmen like Rusk lack compassion that they so often make *mere* means of individuals our foreign policies affect. A liberal foreign policy would aim at a world in which each person possesses the resources of materials, mind and spirit, as well as the opportunities, to carve out a career in conformity to that person's own nature and reasoned choice. At the same time, the policies directed to this end would not treat as *mere* means those who are meant to be the beneficiaries of our benevolence. Unfortunately, that is precisely how countless millions throughout the world are today regarded and dealt with by our policy-makers. Vietnam provides only the most depressing example.

Up to this point, I have dwelled on the relevance of liberal morality to foreign policy. But beyond morality lies a body of doctrines that are peculiarly relevant to this world of revolutionary tumult. For since liberals began to doubt that a free market economy was the answer to all liberal dreams, there has emerged a loose set of principles that help them to understand patterns of dynamic change; a sort of *liberal dialectic*.

It starts with the assumption that revolutions will be made by people who have come to believe that the abysmal poverty and arbitrary

control of their lives are unnecessary. Once the feudal conviction that life must move in predestined grooves is shattered, revolution becomes inevitable unless those who rule buy off discontent with genuine social reform. Those who, in their misery, are busy making a revolution will have little time or inclination to worry as much as they perhaps should about the principles and values rightly cherished by relatively affluent liberals in relatively sophisticated societies. They want bread and relief from personal insecurity—in that order. There will be time enough, or so they think, to worry about freedom and democracy, in their more developed aspects, after the revolution. One does not have to approve of, or to refrain from criticizing, the fact that revolutions are not humane. One simply recognizes that that is the way things are likely to happen; and that criticism without self-righteous blame is possible and desirable.

New forms of tyranny do inevitably result during the post-revolutionary period; but with a difference, if the tyranny is reimposed along with bread and the growth of modern industry. It is not necessary to be a Maoist to recognize that freedom and democracy will mean little to a populace that remembers too well the misery of life that has gone before. Nor is it necessary to suppose that the nature or extent of the tyranny that results is the same in different circumstances. India is far from being a liberal democracy; but the forms of oppression that exist there are far preferable to those that exist in China.

In any event, memories die, and tyranny produces new discontents, new forms of personal insecurity. Thus there is a reemergence of the demand for institutions that foster relief from oppression and, eventually, the conditions of self-respect and the fuller development of human powers. The prerequisites and consequences of a growing industrial order—education and economic sufficiency—will insure that. Economic adequacy will provide the material base; education, the skills of mind and the qualities of spirit that encourage growth of the desire to achieve a progressively fuller control over one's own destiny. This will happen first in professional groups that the very imperatives of industrial growth absolutely require. The scientific and technological communities will hold an oppressive regime to ransom—and the ransom they will demand will be not only money, but relief from arbitrary exercise of power. That is, rule of law and personal autonomy will be established; at first in limited spheres and only precariously. But over time there will be an escalating demand for freedom, and the seeds of discontent will be sown in the society generally. For the exercise of freedom breeds new demands

for freedom. Only ruthless oppression can block these developments; and such ruthlessness would prove industrially self-defeating.

Liberal progress may, therefore, receive many setbacks. But the human pressures generated will be relentless over time. The precipitating mechanism at every point will be what I earlier called the dialectic of disorder. For at each stage the rhetoric of change will outpace the change that is actually permitted. Those who are responsible for perpetrating the rhetorical fraud will find that they have truly sown the seeds, if not of their own violent destruction, at least of their peaceful demise.

History is on the side of liberalism—always supposing that history is not abruptly terminated by nuclear holocaust. This is so precisely because it is men who make history—men with their capacity for deceit, cupidity, irrationality, aggressiveness, bigotry; but also with their unquenchable desire for dignity and the fullest development of their human powers. If the dialectic gives liberals no advantage over Marxists in their ability to forecast the onset and course of revolutionary action, it does enable liberals more accurately to forecast the aftermath of revolutionary disorder.

After the Second World War, many liberals were fixated on the awesome tyranny of Stalin's regime. The "savage anti-Semitism, the turning over to the Gestapo of anti-Nazi refugees, the butchery of entire populations, the starvation of the peasantry and exploitation of the proletariat, the terrorizing of the intelligentsia and the exile to slave camps of uncounted millions,"\* are enough to explain the fixation. Still, it remains a tragedy that, during the postwar period, many American liberals were so thrown into panic by Stalinist excesses that they failed to invoke the very principles of change that would have promoted a more flexible and, from the liberal point of view, more effective reaction to Stalinist tyranny. A liberal as sensitive as George F. Kennan declared just before Stalin's death that the monolithic character of Stalinist Russia was not likely to be altered by peaceful, internal change. It can be truly claimed that most liberals had simply lost not only their head but touch with the insights of their own tradition. For Stalin's ruthless suppression of freedom was bound to produce precisely those forms of arbitrary government and, consequently, insecurity, indignity, and also the erosion of the self-respect that generates not only the demand for rule of law and constitutional order, but the yearning for freedom—not just on the lowest rungs of the social system, but on the highest as well. For no man rests easy when he might hear the midnight knock at his door. Thus, as the generations die who made the revolution and re-

---

\*H. Swados, "What's Left of the Left," *The Nation*, 100th Anniversary Issue, p. 113.

member hunger too well, the spring of liberal aspiration—the desire freely to create one’s own destiny—reasserts itself. It is happening in Russia; and it will happen in China.

Many will undoubtedly regard the foregoing as wildly optimistic. The deep cultural differences that so divide the peoples of the world—the rise of Nazism in one of the world’s most industrialized and cultivated nations, and the magnitude of the problems of population and economic disparities—will seem antithetical to the proposition that history belongs to liberalism.

The weight of historical evidence and the results of more systematic social inquiry does, however, seem to confirm the claim that human beings are not so very different; that the shaping influence of different cultures is undermined by the common institutions of industrial society. In every more advanced nation, cultural sophisticates fear the encroaching pressure of the “American way of life”—that is, of industrial civilization in its brassiest, most wasteful forms—more than any other social development. Nazi Germany was a political order destined either to conquer or to be destroyed. It was destroyed. Had it conquered, I believe the processes of the liberal dialectic would have occurred over a long stretch of time. Finally, the immense economic and population problems that exist are cause for alarm, but not for despair. For they can be dealt with, if only men have the will; we do not lack the necessary knowledge or the resources.

If only men have the will—that is crucial. The evidence for these optimistic assumptions is admittedly indeterminate. Yet, to repeat a point central to what has gone before, if the dialectic is a good conjecture, and if it is a possible outcome, then why should we not accept it as a basis for policy in order better to increase the probability of achieving a liberal society. Under conditions of indeterminacy, the pessimistic hypothesis is not less an ideological response, nor more empirical, than the optimistic hypothesis.

Moreover, the imperatives of social change in industrial society that have been articulated are premised on a judiciously optimistic conception of human nature. I am not denying man’s flaws; only affirming that despite everything, there is also in him an unquenchable desire to carve out a career that is in conformity to his own nature and reasoned choice—in brief, to live the kind of life the liberal prescribes. Orwell’s 1984 nightmare is an instructive projection of tendencies present in any society; but no more than that. For no society has moved very far down the road Orwell envisioned, without encountering barriers, and sometimes disaster. The desire for dignity rooted in self-esteem and the full

development of one's own powers seems in time to be renewed, no matter how individuals are oppressed.

What emerges from these arguments are two points of transcendent importance for present American foreign policy.

First, Communist societies are not more heinous nor resistant to pressures making for progressive internal change than many other tyrannies that have plagued men in history. Indeed, in some ways they are more susceptible to such change—because the scientific, technological, and educational growth they inevitably foster do create those seeds of discontent that set the liberal dialectic into motion. Yugoslavia provides the best support for this optimistic assessment. Today, only two decades after the Yugoslav Communist party assumed power, it is in the process of abdicating from exclusive executive power and is instead adopting the role of guide and stimulus to the nation.\* Whether this change is more formal than real remains to be seen. But few objective observers of what has been happening in Yugoslavia would deny that, though organized opposition to the Communist party has not to this point in time been permitted, the participatory institutions that exist in industry and increasingly in politics have acquired considerably more than merely formal authority. If the account of the nature and threat of Communism here proposed were to gain general acceptance in the United States, the still far too rigid lines of American cold-war policy would be profoundly modified.

Second, America's almost invariable response to revolutionary disorder—the rhetoric of the carrot, the substance of the stick—has proved a failure. At the present time military power is viewed as the main instrument of American policy, economic, political, cultural, and educational assistance as ancillary. Unless this order of priorities is reversed, there can be no escape from a pattern that has led to a mounting succession of disasters in foreign policy.

To adopt this perspective is not to contend that we should dismantle our military shield: only that it be used to further, not, as presently tends to be the case, to defeat liberal aims around the globe. As Walter Lippmann tentatively put it:

---

\*In a comment on these developments, in *The Observer*, (London) June 19, 1966, Edward Crankshaw writes: "The proposed dismantling of the Yugoslav Communist party apparatus, the surrender of the levers of power by an entrenched ruling class of privileged functionaries, is an undertaking of positively stunning sweep and boldness. Its implications for the Communist world in general are quite beyond the imagination at this stage, but are obviously complex and exciting to a degree. Marshall Tito for the second time in his career (the first was the defiance of Stalin in 1948) has started off a great process which will change the mood of history."

. . . in the backward and undeveloped regions of the globe, military power and political influence are antithetical. In order to exercise influence, political, economic, cultural, technical, it is necessary to limit military intervention to those rare instances where there is a clear and present danger to an indubitable vital interest. (*Newsweek*, June 20, 1966).

At the moment, many liberals who in principle favor the proposed reversal of priorities are fearful of implementing the required programs of assistance because of the way they have been used to provide a rationale for American military adventure in Vietnam and elsewhere. But the solution to this problem is not to abandon such programs, but to administer them differently. Increasingly, our assistance should be put at the disposal of international agencies in whose independence both we and the recipient nations can have confidence. In this way the use of such aid as a pretext for military intervention can be prevented. In this way also the institutions of international order can be strengthened; the cause of world peace more effectively served.

There is a sophisticated response to these arguments—one that I am convinced lies at the heart of present American foreign policy. It is the claim that, though the optimistic assumptions implicit in the dialectical view may prove correct, there is also the possibility of ruin if we discount the bellicose rhetoric of our adversaries. Responsible officials may hope for the best, but it is their duty to plan for the worst. For example, though China may be adolescent in her present expression of fear of our aggressive intent, she happens also to be in a position to jeopardize vital American interests before she grows up. Though she may not yet have matched her deeds to increasingly abrasive words, she may yet do so. Any American government that did not maintain sufficient military power, strategically deployed and, where necessary, actively engaged to forestall that contingency, would be irresponsible.

In the last analysis, this is the reason for our intervention in Vietnam; this is why we have ringed China with the most awesome military potential ever possessed by a nation; this is why we have so emphasized military might at the expense of economic effort throughout Asia. The public rationale that emphasizes our commitments and our benevolence is of negligible importance by comparison with this allegedly prudent desire to cope with genuine dangers to our vital national interests.

To accept the foregoing argument amounts to abandonment of the demand that liberal morality be made relevant to foreign policy. For it rests on the assumption that any means which effectively counter the *possible*—not *probable*—threat to vital national interests is permissible.



And so, if statesmen are convinced that despicable means are effective, despicable means will be used. Human beings will be squandered in order to forestall possible outcomes. The remoteness and the massiveness of the evil makes it banal, therefore tolerable.

I do not deny that great evils may be required to forestall even greater ones. But is it too much to ask that the adoption of inhuman means be a response, not to the mere possibility, but to the *probability* of national disaster?

And, in any event, the contingency argument cuts both ways. For it is also *possible* that our policies in Southeast Asia will precipitate nuclear war. Which contingency are we to plan for: the possibility of nuclear war precipitated by de-escalation or the possibility of nuclear war precipitated by escalation? Assuming good will, both aim at preserving the peace. The reasonable alternative cannot be decided without careful appeal to evidence. But, the Administration's record of erroneous prediction in Southeast Asia provides little basis for confidence in its assumptions or its ability to assess evidence objectively.

Consider the following record. On February 25, 1963, Senator Mansfield, after a fact-finding trip to Vietnam reported to President Kennedy that,

Those who bear responsibility for directing operations under the new strategy are optimistic over prospects for success. Indeed, success was predicted to the group (of senators) almost without exception, by responsible Americans and Vietnamese, in terms of a year or two hence.

In a footnote, Senator Mansfield added that Admiral Harry Felt more cautiously predicted that it might take three years. Three years later, almost to the day, President Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam. Four years later, there are over 280,000 men in South Vietnam, and at least 400,000 will be there by the end of this year. In May, 1963, Secretary of Defense McNamara announced that we had turned the corner in Vietnam. On October 2, 1963, he and General Taylor reported to President Kennedy that in "their judgment the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965." On February 18, 1964, Secretary McNamara predicted, in testimony before the Congress, that the "bulk" of U.S. forces could be expected to leave by 1965.

After the war's escalation in February, 1965, the Administration justified its course in terms of the following considerations:

- i. Air strikes would stem the flow of men and materials from North Vietnam into the South.
- ii. The show of force would weaken our adversaries' will to fight.
- iii. Air strikes would hearten our allies and dismay Peking.

iv. The air strikes would diminish the need to send large numbers of conventional forces.

v. Escalation would stabilize the political situation in the South.

A year later, not one of these predictions has been proved accurate. In fact, on January 20, 1966, in his most recent report, this time to President Johnson, Senator Mansfield said:

. . . the fact is that [the present South Vietnamese government is], as other Vietnamese governments have been over the past decade, at the beginning of a beginning in dealing with the problems of popular mobilization in support of the government.

To the dismal record of wrong prediction must be added all the reasons for distrusting the judgments of public officials described in the section that dealt with the politics of pseudo-realism.

The Administration's fears of the Chinese threat to our national security and its assumptions about how best to cope with that threat have the semblance of reason. But when put to the test of available evidence, they are exposed for what they are—the approximate counterpart of the less reasonably expressed fears of the Communist Chinese about America's aggressive intent.

What ought critics do? Many believe that nothing can be done until the structure of American society is transformed. They argue that reason and conventional political pressure cannot drive a wedge between those corporate groups that determine the shape of present policies and those directly responsible for making those policies. They accept C. Wright Mills's thesis that, "In so far as national events are decided, the power elite are those who decide them."\* And, like Mills, they regard decisions having to do with issues of war and peace as "national events."

At the same time, they tend to ignore other claims Mills made—albeit, incoherently. "Any contemporary re-statement of liberal and socialist goals," he wrote, "must include as central the idea of a society in which all men would become men of substantive reason, whose independent reasoning would have structural consequences for their society, its history, and thus for their own life fates."\*\* And, developing the strategic implications of this view, he also claimed that though we live in a society that is democratic mainly in its legal forms and its formal expectations, "we ought not to minimize the enormous value and the considerable opportunity these circumstances make available.† That is,

\**The Power Elite*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 18.

\*\**The Sociological Imagination*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 173-4.

†*Ibid.* p. 191.

one tendency of Mills's thought leads straight to what I have called the politics of radical pressure. And such tactics *cannot effectively influence foreign policy*, if there exists a power elite that is monolithic and impervious to the constraints of reason and peripheral pressure. In their frustration, those who believe that such an elite does exist tend to practice the politics of self-indulgence. But the consequences of this posture for the making of foreign policy are at best unhelpful, at worst a tactical boon to those who defend Administration policies.

Even if structural change is required to alter the central tendencies of American foreign policy in desired ways (and I am not sure that this is so), there are good reasons for qualified optimism about our ability to change those policies in important respects.

1. Capitalist systems are even more diverse and complex than Communist systems. Again and again Marxists and socialists have had to learn that the institutions of countries like the United States are resilient enough to defeat their ominous predictions. Not only does even formal democracy make a significant difference, not only are our precariously established civil liberties nevertheless real, not only do many of the policies adopted by powerful interests for their own selfish reasons have unanticipated but beneficial consequences; but the powerful groups that constitute our "power elite" often have different and competing interests. And this fact is often reflected in conflicting ideas about foreign policy.

Not just the poor or those concerned about civil rights, but also those concerned about urban development, education, health, old-age, and conservation must view with considerable misgiving the existing budgetary priorities. They would like to lay their hands on the sums being allocated for the Vietnam War—especially when they are doubtful that that war really is required for the protection of America's vital interests.

The strategic possibility that presently exists for altering the course of events is greater than most opponents of Administration policies realize. For increasingly even the hawks are implicitly acknowledging that the war does not serve our vital interests. Conservative hawks like Senators Richard Russell and John Tower argue that we should either step our commitment up in order to finish the job quickly, or get out. But if they are serious about the latter, then they must believe that getting out would not jeopardize American security. And liberal hawks like senatorial aspirant G. Mennen Williams argue that—though we should support the President's present policy of restrained militarism, because American security is at stake—if free elections bring to power a Vietnamese government that asks the United States to leave, we should exit quietly.

As he admits that we may be obligated to leave prior to having crushed the "aggression," he is implicitly conceding that our intervention may not be essential to American security after all. Otherwise, as a patriotic and responsible American, he could not seriously contemplate leaving the field to the Communists *under any conditions*. The incoherence of both groups of hawks make them very vulnerable to attack within the framework of conventional politics. The opportunities for those prepared to practice the politics of radical pressure with skill and determination are great.

2. Even if a power elite exists, there is little reason to suppose that its members have identical interests or even perceive developments in precisely the same ways. Let us suppose, for the purposes of argument, that men like Johnson and Kennedy, Goldwater and Hatfield, Curtis Le May and James Gavin are all members of this power elite. Let us even admit that their theoretical differences are at best marginal. It remains true that those slight differences are translatable into policy differences that could have momentous consequences for human civilization. The difference between nuclear holocaust and even a succession of brush-fire wars is no small matter. It does, after all, make sense in such circumstances to support men and positions with whose general outlook we disagree. For them to ascend to power might mark the difference between total disaster and less fateful evil.

At the same time the politics of radical pressure require that struggle should proceed on two levels. Not only must we make the best of the available and defective alternatives in the short run, but we must strive to insure that the options that exist in the long run are much wider than is presently the case. We must work to create a "new (liberal) politics," to elect a more sensible Administration in 1968, to bring pressure on the Nervous Nellies who speak in the accents of the doves but embrace the policies of the hawks, to strengthen the hand of the present Administration against the pressures of the super-hawks—and we must work for all these things simultaneously. For success in each case could mark a fateful difference. It is callously glib, even inhuman, to claim that between, say, Senator Kennedy's views and President Johnson's, or between Johnson's and Goldwater's, there is nothing to choose. To take such positions is to abandon all effort to make intelligent discriminations—to abandon the traditions of reason.

3. Finally, as C. Wright Mills recognized when he was not completely bemused by his theory of the power elite, there are many who manage to have acquired reason and the capacity for morally autonomous judgment despite the faults of existing social conditions. That they re-

tain these powers of mind and spirit despite the tremendous effort to undermine them made by men who, like President Johnson, identify responsible dissent with lack of masculinity is a tribute not only to the strength of the dissenters, but also to a social system resilient enough to enable them to stand firmly against great power. The system that permits such things to happen possesses potentialities which, if more fully exploited, would increase the amount of opposition. When all the evils of the American social system have been counted, a moment should be spared to count its virtues.

There are thus degrees of political freedom that are not always acknowledged by those who prefer rather to denounce the system and make an occasional dramatic noise than to work persistently and carefully toward achievable policy goals. There are also certain tactics that more persistent individuals embrace, tactics that ought to be repudiated because they are self-indulgently self-defeating.

It is not inconsistent for someone to stress the likelihood of progressive change within diverse Communist societies, and yet for tactical and moral reasons to refuse to associate with domestic Communists in certain ways. As Irving Howe recently put it, the Communists have a right to their own house, but not a right to exist in mine (nor, for that matter, as tightly disciplined Communist parties have long made clear, for me to exist in theirs). Those who deny that their moral commitments are relevant to the forms of association they embrace or who weaken their tactical position by self-righteously proclaiming that exclusion of Communists is in principle repugnant, have in effect succumbed to a form of inverted McCarthyism. Without intending to, or even being aware of it, they permit their thought and action to be contaminated by the mindless anti-Communism it is their aim to combat. It is, after all, possible to possess both courage and moral integrity without being foolish.

Similarly, whether one likes it or not, patriotism is a force with which those who hope to effect desirable political aims must reckon. To flaunt this sentiment by forms of protest that do little more than confirm one's own masculinity is the counterpart of that which makes the tough guys in government reject counsels of reason and morality.

Moreover, as I argued earlier, some patriotic concerns are legitimate. Unless one is prepared to match revolutionary deed to revolutionary rhetoric, Americans have an obligation to give weight to national prestige and other short-range *national* interests. Give weight—no more. Only one who willfully wishes to distort this point will insist that its

admission capitulates to powerful political forces it has been the main business of this essay to criticize.

Finally, as I indicated in the last section, the tactics and strategies that have proved so successful in the struggle for civil rights do not, in general, provide an appropriate model for the politics of foreign policy. Too often, however, the important dissimilarities have been ignored; the tactics of the civil rights movement, casually, and fruitlessly, applied to the fight for a better foreign policy. Perhaps the most important difference is the vital role civil rights direct-action techniques have played in dispelling the fear of those oppressed, the apathy of the convinced. But the problem in foreign policy is primarily that of convincing the unconvinced. Moral argument and appeal to self-interest are the most effective means of achieving these aims. The more dramatic forms of protest are likely to prove self-defeating. On the other hand, I do not want to deny that the tactics of the civil rights movement may be useful, especially when, as in the case of the teach-ins, they are creatively modified. I want to insist only that their use ought to be based on careful tactical calculations.

Liberals are opposing Administration policies in increasing numbers. This is so despite their instinctive aversion both to repudiating the policies of a liberal Administration and the form some opposition has taken. But their change of heart will prove futile unless they steer a coldly reflective course between self-indulgence and pseudo-realism. The fate of their nation, of mankind itself, may depend on the resoluteness with which they affirm their independent commitments and the effectiveness with which they practice the politics of radical pressure.