

Strategic Subversion

Power Through Subversion, by Laurence W. Beilenson, *Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1972. 312 pp. \$8.00.*

A FEW FACTS about subversion are known even to those whose historical knowledge is limited to a high school course or a series of popular surveys and novels. For instance: how the French minister Vergennes aided the American colonies in their revolt against England, how the German General Staff moved Lenin in a sealed car so as to spur a socialist revolution that would knock Russia out of World War I, and how Lenin proved himself the classic master of the revolutionary art. Behind these are lesser-known facts that are nevertheless essential to an understanding of historical cause and effect: such as the reasons why Vergennes continued to pour out French treasure after the United States had broken its alliance, the circumstances of the revolts and revolutions that Lenin studied in preparing his own, and the conservative foreign policy that Lenin imposed on the fledgling Soviet government—thus making Stalin rather than Trotsky his true heir.

These facts, and many others about subversions promoted by such diverse figures as Catherine the Great, Louis XIV, Queen Elizabeth I, Pitt, and Palmerston are recounted in this book by Laurence W. Beilenson, whose earlier book *The Treaty Trap* (Washington, 1969) provided a timely and documented warning against relying on treaties for national safety. But *Power Through Subversion* is not a history of that art, much less a collection of cloak-and-dagger stories. It is, rather, a systematic analysis of the uses and limitations of subversion as a political tool and its relation to other forms of political struggle. Despite the wealth of historical data used for illustration, the book belongs in the area of political science, to which Beilenson makes

an original contribution. While popular in style, it is serious in scholarship and is important reading for those who write, teach, or make decisions in matters of American foreign policy and national security.

Beilenson has formulated and demonstrates a typology of subversion, making it possible to speak precisely about the phenomenon in a total political complex. He also demolishes a notion, dear to the hearts of "operation" behavioralists, that political science can measure the chances that a government will be overthrown. Economic and social determinists are fond of mustering facts and statistics to prove that a given historical event "had to happen." But an informed observer in the late eighteenth century would have concluded from objective facts, as did the Duke of Richmond, that revolution was imminent in England, not in France. Some may feel that Beilenson is going too far in declaring that the overthrow of a government is utterly unpredictable. He does show, however, that the factors that lend strength to governments and to revolutionary movements are far more complex and volatile than is commonly realized. The political scientist cannot escape the dilemma pointed out by Kant that the more manageable (in modern terms the more computerizable) he makes his facts, the farther they depart from reality.

As Beilenson shows, rulers and ministers have made wide use of external subversion—support or cultivation of dissident movements in rival states—throughout modern history. But they have always used it as an auxiliary weapon in time of war or in preparation for impending war. Such traditional subversion was spotty, being limited to particular countries; it accepted political and social conditions in the target countries without trying to start or accelerate processes of change; and it turned subversive aid on and off like a spigot, according to the short-run interests of the subverting country. The first important innovator was Vergennes, who saw that the existence of an independent rather than a British-ruled

America improved the French power position, whether or not the United States remained true to its French alliance.

It was Lenin who pioneered in the use of subversion as a strategic instrument of foreign policy rather than as a tactical auxiliary in war. Under the "Lenin Adaptation," as Beilenson calls it, Communist subversion is global rather than spotty. It does not merely accept the political situation in the target country as it develops spontaneously, but promotes structural changes and ideological movements (including those with no ostensible connection with Communism) that erode the target political system and narrow its regime's freedom of action. Furthermore, the spigot of Communist aid is not turned on and off. The building of revolutionary cadres is recognized as a long-term task, even though the cadres may sometimes be sacrificed to immediate goals of Communist diplomacy, as the Egyptian Communist party was betrayed in favor of a Soviet power base in the Levant. In a country such as the United States, the short-run emphasis may be placed on "influencing subversion," particularly that which uses reputable members of the Establishment to defeat adequate defense measures and to spread the euphoric illusion that Communism is no longer aggressive. Yet Communists are constantly preparing for "decisive subversion"—that which overthrows a target government—secure in the knowledge that although the time and place of opportunities cannot be foreseen, they are as certain to arise *somewhere* as lightning is to strike again.

A central doctrine bequeathed by Lenin is the rule never to risk the subversive base by adventurous war. Except when attacked, as was Soviet Russia in 1941, Communist states will make war only when sure of winning—in the case of war by proxy—sure of suffering no direct damage. Communists will *not* risk damage to their nuclei to avoid loss of face. "If you are not inclined to crawl in the mud on your belly," Lenin once said, "you are not a revolutionary, but a chatterbox. . . ." The Kremlin was not

ready to fight about the Communist missiles in 1962, despite Khrushchev's saber-rattling. (Beilenson might have added that it would not have fought in 1962 and *would not fight now* about a United States invasion of Cuba, which is an important but by no means vital interest of the USSR.)

Communist global subversion cannot be overcome, Beilenson concludes, by hoping it will go away or ritually repeating that it has done so. While the Sino-Soviet split—which like any other may end without warning—inhibits outright military attack on the West, warfare has never been the preferred Communist weapon anyway. Subversion is actually on the increase in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and it never was dependent on monolithic direction. Nor can any comfort be had from the “convergence” theory: what Communists want is power, not socialism.

The Lenin adaptation gives the Communists many advantages in the global power struggle. One is that subversion, or even effective countersubversion, does not fit the political style of Western liberalism. Another is that the nuclear stalemate prohibits offensive war against the Communist bases. But these bases are themselves vulnerable to subversion, if Western statesmen will make up their minds to grasp the weapon and to approach the problem as Lenin did: analyzing the target political system from the inside out rather than from the outside in. Beilenson lists the conditions that make internal subversion feasible and, in the long run, likely in both the Soviet Union and China.

The final chapter of *Power Through Subversion* outlines plans for an “American Adaptation,” that is, for systematic aid by the United States to dissidents in Communist-ruled countries. The details of Beilenson's program need not be summarized here: suffice it so say that the “American Adaptation” would not involve the use of American troops abroad and would be relatively moderate in cost. It would not, furthermore, do violence to republican political ethics. What it would do is enable the

United States to regain the political offensive: something sorely needed for our own morale as well as to shift the balance of world power once more in our favor.

Reviewed by KURT GLASER

The Anatomy of Silence

**The Dismemberment of Orpheus:
Toward a Postmodern Literature,**
by Ihab Hassan, *New York: Oxford
University Press, 1971. x + 297 pp.*
\$8.50.

IHAB HASSAN remarked in an essay published in the Winter 1970 *Virginia Quarterly Review*: “Finally, criticism, weighted by its own skepticism, lags still behind the literature of its day.” He went on to point out how much critics—especially academic critics—remain tied down to the concepts of organic form and fail utterly to manage any “sense of discontinuity.” Hassan has tried very hard in the past few years to come to terms with the critical performance, to make it accommodate the radical changes experienced in the arts. Thus he goes so far as to suggest that criticism “should offer the reader empty spaces, silences, in which he can meet himself in the presence of literature.”

In some of his more recent essays Hassan has begun to experiment with a form which he has labeled paracriticism. There is something narrative and dramatic about it as well as didactic. It comes dangerously close to being discontinuous and to rivaling the condition of art. Hassan remarked in the “Prologue” to his 1967 book, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* that the critical act should “endanger itself, as literature does, and . . . testify to our condition.” This is what paracriticism is all about. Hassan uses it to superb advantage in his *Virginia Quarterly*