

The Heresy of the Young

The Children of Darkness: Some Reflections on the Kid Cult, by Richard S. Wheeler, *New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House, 1973. 189 pp. \$7.95.*

MR. WHEELER'S PURPOSE is to discuss the conflict between secular and religious influences in the United States; but in doing so he has chosen to focus on the youth rebellion—on “the kids and their counterculture”—because he believes it to be chiefly the young who have been subverting the established order, and the churches, he finds, have by and large defected to their side. Less than two generations ago, he says, there was a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the individualist, capitalist and Christian majority and the handful of communist or anarchist radicals who wanted to overthrow our society and to replace it with another organized on a collectivist or on an antinomian pattern. Today the gap is rapidly being closed, and Mr. Wheeler finds a certain absurdity in the fact that it is now the liberals who

like to consider themselves alienated and slightly radical *vis-à-vis* the rest of America [while] the New Left feels alienated *vis-à-vis* the Liberal Establishment, although the helmsmen of the New Left have set their compasses only a few degrees to the left of the Estab-

ishment. [All this has led to an] obsession with change as the major goal of politics, regardless of the beneficial or damaging result of that change. . . . [Whether a change] is good or bad is less important than whether it is a certified "reform". . . .

By various agitations, demonstrations and compulsions the Left is striving to shift the "system" in a direction contrary to the feelings and desires of the great mass of Americans. What it wants, as Mr. Wheeler shows, is a diversion of the national energies from defense and from productive welfare to such unproductive purposes as the further expansion of the Department of Justice and of the "civil rights" bureaucracies. Thus, as Mr. Wheeler insists, the Left Establishment is really a reactionary force, as may be seen in its opposition to needed and genuinely progressive reforms, such as the curbing of the excessive powers of the Interstate Commerce Commission and correcting the inflationary aspect of the Social Security program. Supporters of the Left Establishment will not give serious consideration to any measures that might tend to diminish the oppressive powers of the secularist and collectivist state. The evident fact, for example, that minimum-wage legislation, by decreasing the number of available jobs, has had the effect of increasing unemployment among marginal workers, thereby adding to the smothering social welfare burden, is dismissed as irrelevant. Government regulation of more and more social and economic activities—provided, of course, that it does not restrict the activities of communists, anarchists, civil-rights militants, and so on—is held to be a good in itself.

The farther leftward one goes, Mr. Wheeler discovered, the more strait-jacketed the mind, the more stubborn the refusal to admit even the obvious, wherever it conflicts with the liberal dogma. Just try, for example, says our author,

to get a leftist to consider the possible advantages of returning to a gold stand-

ard. . . . Such a standard is taboo because it limits the power of the government to inflate the currency. It also increases private options and liberties to the extent that it circumscribes the government's monetary power.

Mr. Wheeler sees the hand of the Liberal Establishment in the violent uproars that so recently shook the university campuses across the nation. The liberals, he tells us, set the stage for the riots, guided, promoted, and encouraged them. The liberal professors, dominant in most university faculties, saw in these maniacal "kids" a renovative force and enthusiastically urged them on. Liberal jurists expanded the modes of "protest" by knocking down legal barriers to riotous behavior, throwing a mantle of idealism over extra-legal disorders as long as they were undertaken in the guise of political or racial dissent. "The kids," violently resisting interference by the state where it impinged on their own liberty of action, but demanding collectivist coercions for others, were granted a massive hunting license.

The fact that these progeny of the liberals seem, for the moment at least, to have calmed down a bit does not in Mr. Wheeler's opinion betoken any change in the governing ideology. There is already, he observes, a good deal of lamentation in the liberal press about the new "apathy" among the students; but the youth rebellion, even at its height, was not directed against society itself so much as against those primal values and sacred beliefs that have molded and ordered our American society.

Reviewed by TOMMY W. ROGERS