

# MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



## *The Age of Liberalism*

HENRY REGNERY

WE LIVE in a time dominated by words: the printed word in the form of books, magazines and newspapers, the spoken word brought to us by radio and television. From the morning newspaper to the commentator on evening TV, from the first-grade primer, or basal reader, to use the ugly contemporary description, to the latest work of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. or Kenneth Galbraith, we are subjected to a constant flood of words, not of the *word*, which, as the embodiment of truth and the primal order of being was *In the beginning*, but of words, words intended to implant opinions, to make us do or believe something we would not have done or believed otherwise. It is this fact of words which characterizes our time, which differentiates it from all others, and which has made those who, in one way or another, control the dissemination of words the real rulers of our society.

The lords of the media, as was demonstrated as long ago as the Spanish-American War, can start wars, or, with the black art of public relations, can make an unknown utility lawyer who makes the proper superficial impression into a great statesman, as was done with Wendell Willkie, or

an amiable Illinois lawyer in the person of Adlai Stevenson, who had been a mediocre governor, but was a polished speaker, had a great facility for phrase making, and, as John Dos Passos put it, "held all the fashionable views,"<sup>1</sup> into a world figure. We are told that the president of the United States is the most powerful man in the world, but as the fate of Richard Nixon demonstrated, the media are more powerful still. Nixon was the first man for generations to become president in defiance of the media, but they were able—admittedly with his help—to destroy him. Without the enormous barrage of publicity the combined forces of press, TV and radio were able to concentrate on Watergate, it would have made no greater impact on public opinion than, say, the Bobby Baker case during the administration of Lyndon Johnson. Those who control press, TV and radio have become the fourth branch of government, and in many ways have the greater influence and power.

There is, then, the fact of this great instrument which modern technology and business organization have created, and the further fact that the viewpoint and general position of those who have controlled it

since the 1930's has been predominantly liberal, a combination of circumstances, we must face it, which is the most striking feature of the landscape of our time. During the fight over intervention in the war that had broken out in Europe in 1939 the America First Committee and those of similar persuasion without doubt had the bulk of the American people behind them, but the press that counted, the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Time*, were on the other side, and, needless to say, carried the day. It was possible to win the Republican nomination in 1940 for Wendell Willkie, who three months before was virtually unknown, in preference to Robert Taft, who was a national figure, because that is what those who controlled the press wanted. It was not because Willkie was a stronger candidate or a better man than Taft, but because his views were more acceptable to the rather small but powerful group that was in a position to pull the strings of public opinion, which is not, of course, the opinion of the public, but of those able to make themselves heard.

Writing of American participation in World War I, Albert J. Nock remarked, "We cannot help remembering that this was a liberal's war and a liberal's peace." World War II and the peace that followed it represented the final triumph of modern liberalism. With a four-term president in the White House, almost complete control of the means of communication, and the colleges and universities largely under their influence, the liberals had the world at their feet. But, one may well ask, Who are the liberals? What do they want? What do they stand for? As for who they are, Mrs. Roosevelt and Justice Warren were liberals, as were Adlai Stevenson and President Kennedy; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. is a liberal, so are Kenneth Galbraith and Clark Kerr. Justice William O. Douglas and Hugh Hefner are liberals, and it is only in a time dominated by the values of liberalism that such a man as Hefner could have

made his way, with his "Playboy philosophy," to fame and fortune. The Civil Liberties Union is a liberal organization, the Ford Foundation shows a strong preference for liberal causes, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are liberal newspapers, *The Nation* is a liberal magazine, and Americans for Democratic Action a liberal political pressure group. What the liberals want, what they stand for, is more difficult to describe precisely, all the more so because their position often changes, is not consistent within itself, and not every liberal spokesman agrees with every other, but certain basic ideas and principles can be discerned.

The liberal, to begin with an important aspect of his position, takes a benign view of man, at least in the abstract; the idea of original sin he regards as medieval and with abhorrence. Man, he believes, whatever the theologians may say, is basically good; what tendency toward evil he may show is a result of social influences, not of any innate human flaw. Where the evil influences in society came from if man is basically good he does not explain. The liberal believes that all human and social problems are capable of solution, and in spite of his tendency to blame society for criminal or malicious behavior instead of the perpetrator, he has an almost mystical faith in the power of government and an equally strong distrust of private power. "The diversity of private power, its independence, its actual popularity in the culture at large seems to the left to be subversive of true order. Public power is endowed by the liberal-rationalist with natural superiority and with a kind of immaculateness that has theistic reverberations."<sup>2</sup> With public power, the liberal believes, anything is possible: the age-old problem of race relations can be solved by forcibly integrating schools and neighborhoods, the problem of poverty by a government program, of ignorance by requiring everyone to go to school, of health by socialized medicine. Even the secondary dif-

ferences between the sexes can seemingly be abolished by government action.

In his Message to Congress on January 24, 1944, President Roosevelt announced a "Second Bill of Rights" which would guarantee the "right" of everyone not only to a useful and remunerative job, a decent home, a good education, protection from fear of old age and unemployment, but to good health. Such promises, ridiculous as they may sound—to whom does one go to claim one's "right" to good health?—are not at all inconsistent with the liberal position as it has been represented over the years. It is no more absurd to guarantee everyone the "right" to good health than to guarantee the freedom from fear, which was one of the "Four Freedoms" we were assured we fought World War II to attain, and which the liberal intelligentsia accepted without a qualm or murmur of protest.

Roy Campbell, with the poet's facility for getting at the substance of things, once remarked that if a dog bites a man, the liberal automatically takes the side of the dog; he equally automatically, Campbell went on to say, takes the side of the criminal against the policeman, of the striker against the employer, of the black man against the white. Mrs. Roosevelt, by way of example, said that she would never cross a picket line; when Caesar Chavez announces a boycott of table grapes, the liberal intelligentsia, whether they know anything or not of the facts of the case, dutifully stop eating grapes. If a boycott of lettuce is demanded, as one man they stop eating lettuce. Any revolutionary adventurer, whether Castro, Llumumba, Nkrumah, Sukarno, Allende, is greeted with uncritical acclaim as the saviour of his people so long as he invokes the proper anti-imperialist, democratic, class-struggle incantations; when one after another turns out to be the usual self-serving, power-seeking opportunist, it makes no difference, the next to appear evokes the same uncritical enthusiasm.

His political heroes—Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy,

George McGovern—appear to the liberal not as ordinary men seeking votes, but trailing clouds of glory, endowed with the gift of prophecy, and especially with that gift the liberal seems to regard with special favor, charisma. The liberal's capacity for self-delusion is almost unlimited, and experience seems to have little or no effect on him. He came back from Russia in the twenties and thirties with tales of having "seen the future and it works"; now he comes back from Communist China with the same breathless enthusiasm.<sup>3</sup>

The Nuremberg Trials, we were assured, were going to introduce the reign of law between the nations, in spite of the rather obvious fact that at least one of the judges came into court with unclean hands and that one of the basic principles of Western justice, the prohibition of *ex post facto* law, had been ignored. The United Nations Charter was greeted as the herald of a new era of peace and freedom, although one of the chartering nations, at the time, was in the process of depriving its smaller Western neighbors, with the usual methods of military occupation, mass arrests and deportations, of their freedom and national existence. The causes are endless—industrial democracy, progressive education, school rooms without walls, civil rights demonstrations, freedom marches, open housing, one man-one vote, integration—whatever it is promises the millenium, and the failure of one cause merely whets the liberal's appetite for the next.

But why should otherwise intelligent, normal people who are probably endowed with more than the usual share of good will and the spirit of generosity be so singularly lacking in the ability to see things as they are, to accept the human condition for what it is? It is an old and well established principle of logic that a false premise leads to a false conclusion—admit that the moon is made of green cheese, Norbert Wiener used to say, and it is possible to prove that Murphy is the pope. The liberal begins with the premise of the innate goodness of man and his ultimate perfectability, all human

experience notwithstanding, and finds himself, unwittingly, defending a system of government which engages in mass terror and slave labor camps, and depends for its very existence on a vast system of secret police.

There is more, however, than his inadequate conception of the nature of man that limits the liberal's grasp of reality: the basis of his system of values is faulty. The dominant philosophical position in this country for the past two generations at least has been the naturalism of, among others, John Dewey. Not all naturalists are liberals, although Dewey himself was, and not all liberals are naturalists, but there is certainly justification for the assertion that modern American liberalism has been strongly influenced by the philosophy of naturalism, that naturalism is, in fact, the philosophy of liberalism. Values, according to naturalistic philosophy, are determined by desires; there is no such thing as good or evil in itself, values have no reality outside experience. "There was much argument among naturalistic moralists about which desires could be satisfied and how they could be satisfied to produce value. But they agreed on the basic notion that it was desires that constituted value and therefore each in and by itself was neither good nor bad."<sup>4</sup> Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, for example, described the habits and customs of a primitive people. What right do we have, the author implied, to say that the traditional attitudes of Western civilization toward sexual relations and morality are better? It is all a matter of custom, of what people actually do, not of what they ought to do, which was also the underlying assumption of the Kinsey Report. Values, therefore, are not normative, but merely reflect a given state of affairs. The ultimate consequence of all this is the "Pleasure Principle" of the student revolutionaries, from which emanated such pearls as the following: "In SDS, f . . . . g is a statement of community, and there's a lot of inter-f . . . . g, but it's not casual. Sex comes out of a relationship, and is used to build

a relationship stronger."<sup>5</sup> From John Dewey to Margaret Mead, thence to the student revolutionaries and the SDS was a perfectly logical development, although not one that Dewey himself would in any way have wanted or welcomed.

From all this derives the liberal attitude toward evil: for the liberal, evil is not an existential fact, but a social problem, which is doubtless one of the reasons liberals found it so difficult, if not impossible, to recognize Stalin and Soviet Russia for what they were. So long as the Communists arrayed themselves in the garments the liberals approved of—anti-colonialism, equality, a democratic constitution, the abolition of exploitation—the liberals were quite willing to overlook, or forgive, what they actually did, if they were able to perceive it at all. One of the most flagrant examples of such myopia and self-delusion, but one that is by no means unique, is Joseph E. Davies' *Mission to Moscow*, and particularly the acclaim it received from the liberal press. George F. Kennan has described the indignation of the professional staff of the U. S. Embassy in Moscow when Davies arrived in 1936 as ambassador—they all seriously considered resigning in protest.<sup>6</sup> The quality of the book itself, and of Davies' competence as an observer, may be judged by his comments concerning the great purge trials of the old Bolsheviks, which he witnessed:

On the face of the record in this case it would be difficult for me to conceive of any court, in any jurisdiction, doing other than adjudging the defendants guilty of violations of the law as set forth in the indictments and as defined by the statutes.<sup>7</sup>

As if that was not enough: "The prosecutor [Vyshinsky] conducted the case calmly and generally with admirable moderation."<sup>8</sup> George Kennan, on the other hand, who attended the trials as Ambassador Davies' interpreter, speaks of "Vyshinsky's thundering brutalities."<sup>9</sup> Davies saw him differently: "The Attorney General is a

man of about 60 and is much like Homer Cummings; calm, dispassionate, intellectual, and able and wise. He conducted the treason trial in a manner that won my respect and admiration as a lawyer."<sup>10</sup> One more quotation will probably be sufficient to put *Mission to Moscow* and its author in proper perspective:

Stalin is a simple man, everyone says, but a man of tremendous singleness of purpose and capacity for work. He holds the situation in hand. He is decent and clean-living and is apparently devoted to the purpose of the projection of the socialist state and ultimate communism, with sufficient resiliency in his make-up to stamp him as a politician as well as a great leader.<sup>11</sup>

The book was bad enough, but Davies, let us not forget, was an ambitious, superficial man whose single claim to distinction was a very rich wife, and in his reports to Washington and in his book was only serving the purpose for which President Roosevelt had sent him to Moscow; much worse than the book was its utterly irresponsible reception by the liberal clique. *Foreign Affairs* commended it as ". . . one of the best informed books to appear in recent years on Soviet Russia";<sup>12</sup> *Pacific Affairs* described it as ". . . a book of exceptional importance";<sup>13</sup> The *Saturday Review of Literature* as ". . . one of the most significant books of our time";<sup>14</sup> and Walter Duranty, who for many years had been the Moscow correspondent of the *New York Times* proclaimed: "To me the charm of this book is first of all its acuteness. How well Davies understood, and how accurately he judged!"<sup>15</sup> (How accurately Duranty was in the habit of judging may be surmised from the following, quoted in *Time*, February 15, 1943: "I see Mr. Stalin as the clear-minded statesman who looks at East and West—both ways at once.") Perhaps the most significant and revealing comment about the book is the following, which appeared on the jacket: "The most important contribution to the literature on the Soviet

Union," and came from no less an objective authority than Maxim Litvinov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Finally, to make the story more or less complete, it should be mentioned that *Mission to Moscow* was a selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club and was made into a much publicized movie.

It would be no problem to give many examples of such self-delusion, but one more may be sufficient to illustrate the point I am trying to make and one aspect of the general temper of the time. In its account of the Yalta Conference *Time* found itself able to say (February 19, 1945): "By any standards, the Crimean Conference was a great achievement." Now this was the conference, it seems scarcely necessary to mention, where the basic decisions, which were later ratified at Potsdam, were made which resulted in all of Eastern Europe coming under the domination of Communist Russia—the three Baltic countries, Poland, Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Roumania and Bulgaria—and by that time there could not, or need not, have been any doubt about what this meant. In addition, it was agreed that Eastern Poland would be ceded to Russia, with the Polish population of the area to be moved westward, and that all German territory East of the Oder-Neisse would go to Poland with the exception of the northern half of East Prussia, which went to Russia—this included such historically German cities as Königsberg, Breslau, Stettin and Danzig—and that the German population of over seven million would be driven out. The Yalta Conference, without doubt, resulted in one of the most monstrous international agreements in history.<sup>16</sup> How, then, could *Time* describe it as "a great achievement"? Because, to quote *Time* again, "there was a special recognition of certain precepts which Americans have always held dear, and which would reassure many a citizen that World War II was not being fought in vain," namely, "free and unfettered elections by universal suffrage and secret ballot," and "the principle of collective security." So

long as the verbal garment was beyond reproach—free and unfettered elections, collective security—the substance could be ignored.

By the end of World War II, liberalism had become an orthodoxy, an orthodoxy “so profoundly self-righteous,” as John Dos Passos, speaking from direct experience described it, “that any critic became an untouchable.”<sup>17</sup> While the liberals constantly affirmed their devotion to tolerance and to the idea of what they called “the open society,” their tolerance did not, as a rule, include criticism of the truth, and liberalism was the embodiment of truth. The response to two books which appeared during this period which questioned the very basis of the liberal position will give an impression of some of the obstacles ideas which did not fit the prevailing and accepted thought patterns had to overcome to gain attention.

In 1944 the University of Chicago Press published an unassuming looking, scholarly book without fanfare of any kind and in a very small first printing, which soon became the center of discussion and shook the liberal position to its foundations. This was F. A. Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*. It had first been published in England—Hayek at the time was professor of economics at the University of London—and had been rejected by several American trade publishers, in one case on the basis of the report of a reader who stated that, although he thought the book would enjoy a good sale, it was “unfit for publication by a reputable house.”<sup>18</sup> The thesis of the book, simply stated, was that centralized economic planning—socialism, in other words—must inevitably lead to complete collectivism and the loss of personal freedom. The book was quite obviously the work of a serious scholar whose interest was not indulgence in ideological polemics but the preservation of the free society. The *New York Times*, to its everlasting credit and the astonishment of many, gave the book an excellent and favorable review in a prominent place by Henry Hazlitt, and the *Reader’s Digest* made its ideas widely available by

means of a skillful condensation. Such attention quickly mobilized a counterattack. Alvin H. Hansen, then much quoted as a “leading authority” on economic questions, pronounced categorically in the pages of the *New Republic*: “Hayek’s book will not be long lived. There is no substance in it to make it long lived.”<sup>19</sup> The *Library Journal* spoke of its “abstract presentation and poor organization,”<sup>20</sup> but the major attack came from Professor Herman Finer of the University of Chicago in a polemical, abusive book called *The Road to Reaction*, which is of much less interest now, except as a period piece, than the acclaim it inspired. The Kirkus Book Review Service, which was then, and still is, widely used by libraries in the selection of books, described the Finer book as “An exciting book—and a much needed one—the atomic bomb to explode the thesis of the reactionaries’ *Mein Kampf*, Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*.”<sup>21</sup> In the *New York Times*, S. E. Harris of the Harvard faculty of economics welcomed Finer’s polemic with the words, “This brilliant, persuasive volume . . . exposes his [Hayek’s] fallacies and errors of fact.” Finer, of course, was “a world authority,” and his book one “no reader can afford to disregard.”<sup>22</sup>

The American success of *Road to Serfdom* came to no one as a greater surprise than to its author, who had written it with the English situation and a scholarly audience in mind, and publication by a university press in a very small first printing would in any case ordinarily almost have guaranteed a limited sale. The force of its argument and the coherence of its presentation, plus the fortunate circumstance of the Hazlitt review in the *New York Times* and the condensation in the *Reader’s Digest* made it an enormously influential book, and one which, in spite of Alvin Hansen’s confident prediction, has become a classic in the literature of economic and political theory.

My second example was also published by the University of Chicago Press, Richard Weaver’s *Ideas Have Consequences*.

Weaver, when the book was published in 1948, was a rather obscure professor of English in the college of the University of Chicago; the fact that the Director of the Press, W. T. Couch, chose to publish the book and to put all the resources of the press behind it was not, in my opinion, unrelated to his rude dismissal several years later. It was Weaver's purpose to try to discover why it was, as he put it, that

. . . in the first half of the twentieth century, we look about us to see hecatombs of slaughter; we behold entire nations desolated by war and turned into penal camps by their conquerors; we find half of mankind looking upon the other half as criminal. Everywhere occur symptoms of mass psychosis. Most portentous of all, there appear diverging bases of value, so that our single planetary globe is mocked by worlds of different understanding.<sup>23</sup>

The thesis of the book was that Western civilization had taken a wrong turn in the fourteenth century with William of Occam's questioning of universals; from this beginning came the gradual erosion of belief in objective truth and in the reality of transcendental values which brought us to our present predicament, a thesis which the author developed with great skill and care and in a style appropriate to his subject.

*Ideas Have Consequences* was a book, therefore, concerned with an enormously significant problem, and offered a serious, well-grounded analysis of its nature. How, then, did the liberal reviewers respond? Exactly as one might have expected. Howard Mumford Jones, for example, reviewing the book in the *New York Times*<sup>24</sup> accused Weaver of "irresponsibility," to which Weaver replied:

The way for a writer to show responsibility is to make perfectly clear the premises from which he starts. His statements can then be judged with reference to those principles. I proceeded at some length to make explicit the grounds of

my argument, and I have no reason to feel that they are left unclear. I maintain, as Jones correctly infers, that form is prior to substance, and that ideas are determinants.<sup>25</sup>

Charles Frankel, in a review as condescending as it was superficial, found Weaver's thesis "trivial, if not self-contradictory,"<sup>26</sup> and the reviewer for the *Annals of the American Academy*, J. D. Hertzler, while conceding that there were a "number of things one definitely applauds," concluded with the remark, "the nostalgia for and flight to the ideas and 'conditions' of the Middle Ages leaves one cold."<sup>27</sup>

The book is not without faults—there are exaggerations, for example, which Howard Mumford Jones took great delight in pointing out—but it was written under the cloud of Auschwitz, Yalta, Hiroshima, the mass air raids, unconditional surrender, when civilization seemed bent on destroying itself, a situation which would incline a man as sensitive to the world around him as Weaver was to take a rather apocalyptic view. Anyone, however, who uses such words as "irresponsible" or "trivial" to describe this book says more about himself than the book, and whatever the liberal reviewers may have said, *Ideas Have Consequences*, nearly thirty years after its publication, is still in print, is still being read, and still has much to say to us, as the following sentence from the last chapter will indicate:

And, before we can bring harmony back into a world where everything seems to meet "in mere oppugnancy," we shall have to regard with the spirit of piety three things: nature, our neighbors—by which I mean all other people—and the past.<sup>28</sup>

While my primary purpose in this paper is to describe the temper of the period immediately following World War II, one cannot help but pose the question, How did it happen? Why was it that a substantial part of those who dominated the communication

of ideas should have been, in their basic attitudes and values, in opposition to the attitudes and values which had been regarded and accepted as a traditional and basic element of American society? Jefferson had taught, and Americans believed, that "The government is best which governs least"; now the group that set the patterns of thought were telling us that social justice required more and more government supervision of every aspect of life; what came to be called, derisively, the "Puritan ethic"—faith, prudence, temperance, self-reliance, the drive to "get ahead," to improve ones self—was represented as anti-social and detrimental to the public good. How could it have happened that in a matter of only a few years such an attitude toward morality, taste and behavior as represented by Hugh Hefner's "Playboy philosophy" or the "pleasure principle" of the revolutionary students could not only have won general acceptance, but become almost an integral part of American life? Pornography, once "the last resort of those disqualified from social life," as Ronald Berman put it, had won the sanction of some of the leading people of society—can one imagine Justice Hughes or Justice Taft writing for a pornographic magazine, as Justice Douglas has seen fit to do?

Joseph Schumpeter and F. A. Hayek agree on the term "intellectuals" to describe the people who presume to speak for us, who mold opinion and tell us what to think and believe, and this, no doubt, is as good a description as any. Hayek defines intellectuals as "secondhand dealers in ideas,"<sup>29</sup> and Schumpeter as "people who wield the power of the spoken and written word, and one of the touches that distinguishes them from other people who do the same is the absence of direct responsibility for practical affairs."<sup>30</sup> Schumpeter gives a witty, interesting and convincing explanation of why so many intellectuals have become socialist (he uses socialist and liberal interchangeably), which includes the following two observations:

. . . the intellectual group cannot help nibbling, because it lives on criticism and its whole position depends on criticism that stings; and criticism of persons and current events will, in a situation in which nothing is sacrosanct, fatally issue in criticism of classes and institutions.<sup>31</sup>

and the fact that mass education has made a large number of people psychologically incapable of working on the level of their talents, but has trained them for nothing else, thus creating a large group of dissatisfied people who feel themselves outside normal society.

Having described the intellectual as a "secondhand dealer in ideas," Hayek makes the important point that intellectuals are inclined "to judge all particular issues in the light of certain general ideas,"<sup>32</sup> and that such general ideas usually consist of a rather confused, ill-digested conglomerate of concepts which have been current and fashionable, which may derive from new truths, but which are often incorrectly applied and only partially understood. As examples of such intellectual fashions he mentions the theory of evolution, the idea of the predominant influence of environment over heredity, the theory of relativity, the power of the unconscious, equality, the superiority of planning over the results of spontaneous development, and since the intellectual is the means by which ideas and opinions reach the public, "the 'climate of opinion' of any period," Hayek goes on to say, "is thus essentially a set of very general preconceptions by which the intellectual judges the importance of new facts and opinions."<sup>33</sup>

Hayek further points out that the intellectual's preference for generalizations also contributes to his preference for socialism, for public power as opposed to private power. He prefers "broad visions, the specious comprehension of the social order as a whole which a planned system promises"<sup>34</sup> to the tiresome comprehension of technical details and practical problems which the

proper understanding of the workings of a free society requires.

Granted, the intellectuals are as they have been described, how was it possible for them to attain the dominant role in our society that has been ascribed to them? Why is it, for example, that the propertied class, which supports the universities, has not only permitted them to be largely taken over by a group that teaches an orthodoxy completely antithetical to its own, but goes right on supporting the universities even after this has been pointed out? Why is it, as Schumpeter put it, that "the bourgeoisie," as he calls the propertied class, "besides educating its own enemies, allows itself in turn to be educated by them?" Schumpeter's explanation is that "the bourgeois order no longer makes any sense to the bourgeoisie itself and that, when all is said and nothing is done, it does not really care."<sup>35</sup> This may be true, but it is only a part of the explanation, and perhaps a small part.

The infection started and was propagated in the colleges and universities. Eliseo Vivas was the assistant during the thirties, when the process was just getting underway, of a very well known and influential professor at one of the great Midwestern universities. This man was head of the department of philosophy, a friend of a powerful political family of the state, and had played an influential part in the ousting of a president of the university and in the selection of his successor. He was a man of no scholarly distinction, but a superb speaker who, as Vivas describes it, "... employed his superior rhetorical powers in dishing out the thin gruel that he took to be philosophic wisdom—relativism and atheism. He was at his best before large audiences, especially when the audience was not altogether with him: the voice became softer and deeper, the attitude more gentle, the manner more appealing, expressing a generous desire to lead his students to a better life than their conservative parents had led, if they accepted his reasonable views. His appeal was to the uncon-

ventional and critical resentment of the students to the *status quo*. He addressed the students in a humor they could not miss and in a quasi-poetical language that was as corny as it was middle-to-low brow. He suggested to them, clearly but never explicitly, that he and they were victims of an irrational system, hedging them around with absolutes and false theology. The students loved him and his message."<sup>36</sup>

Vivas was then a teaching assistant, and like many other young academics of that time deeply involved in a flirtation with Marxism, which in his case, however, did not lead to a commitment. In speaking of his own teaching in those far-off days, the early thirties, he remarks: "Viewed from outside, his teaching was quite successful. Students crowded his courses and their reactions to his teaching were always strong. . . . But was he really a teacher at all? He was not teaching philosophy; he was carrying on a relentless job of propaganda for his own views."<sup>37</sup> Because he and many of his colleagues at the time, he goes on to say, ". . . put more effort into getting their own ideas accepted than they did in training students to judge for themselves, they could not be called teachers. They were indoctrinators."<sup>38</sup>

The great question, of course, is how all this affected the students. Many of them, as Vivas said, came to the university, especially in those days, filled with political, religious, moral and social views which, as he put it, "were not merely naive but absurd." It was the teacher's duty to "lead them to think, since all they did was to parrot the nonsense they had learned at home. . . . But how far to crack their ignorance? Above all, how to crack it? It was all too easy for a teacher with his dialectical hammer to split open the student's mind and spill his beliefs on the ground, leaving him feeling total devastation, emptiness, acute and angry pain. Furthermore, neither he nor his friends," Vivas go on to say, speaking of his own teaching, "distinguished between the millennial, fragrant, respectable orthodoxies that had sustained the civiliza-

tion they claimed to champion, and the smelly little ones. For him and his friends all orthodoxies except their own were little and smelly. Their own views, they complacently believed, were not an orthodoxy, they were the truth. . . . Stripped roughly of the coverage of his beliefs, the student's personality underwent a shock from which sometimes he never successfully recovered. The upshot was that the 'smelly little orthodoxies' that were discarded from students were displaced by devastating cynicism, and since the need to believe was not eradicated when his beliefs were shown up, the student was often ready to fall for the strong dogmatism that was at hand, Marxism."<sup>39</sup> The process Vivas describes was going on, to a greater or less degree, in every college and university in the country, and grew in intensity as time went on, with the SDS and the student revolutionaries of the 1960's one of its more spectacular, but by no means most significant results. It was through this process that liberalism in its modern form became the reigning orthodoxy of the country.

But I have still not answered the question, Why did the propertied classes, who supply the money, permit it to happen? If Schumpeter's explanation, that they do not care, is not sufficient, what is the reason? On the face of it, it would seem that the non-university community should have no difficulty eliminating what Schumpeter calls its "enemies" from the educational institutions—it supplies the money, and the trustees, who are largely from outside the university, in theory, at least, control the institution itself. But how are such people to know what really goes on, and even if they know, what can they do about it? Such a professor of philosophy as Vivas described without doubt had a thoroughly corrupting influence, but how could a member of the legislature, let us say, or a trustee, prove it, and even if he could, what could he do? We live, we are told, in an "open society," where nothing is sacred, in which all questions are "open questions." If nothing is sacred, if all questions are open

questions, what is subversive? The universities have made themselves, to a large degree, autonomous by their insistence on tenure, on academic freedom—which is interpreted as academic license—and on the principle that faculty is to be appointed on the basis of scholarly competence alone, without regard to background, point of view, or moral values, all of which has made the professor impregnable and disarmed the university itself. Much of the same thing has happened, on a modified scale, in the public high schools.

One of the principle reasons that the situation has developed which Schumpeter describes as "the bourgeoisie permitting itself to be educated by its enemies" is that what he calls the bourgeoisie has little or no understanding of the influence and importance of ideas. There are many reasons for this, one of which is doubtless inadequate education. As Eric Voegelin put it:

It will be sufficient to state that the students have good reason to revolt; and if the reasons they actually advance are bad, one should remember that the educational institutions have cut them off from the life of reason so effectively that they cannot even articulate the causes of their legitimate unrest.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, a man who has spent his life in practical pursuits, as most of us do, whose judgments are necessarily made on the basis of everyday considerations, finds it difficult not only to think in terms of abstractions, but to attach much importance to them. Then there is the attitude of the successful businessman toward the intellectual: for rather obvious reasons, but unfortunate in their consequences for the businessman, he is inclined not to take the intellectual seriously, and considering the general impression made by intellectuals as a group, this is not difficult to understand. Why should a man who has successfully run a substantial business, which means dealing with numerous and constantly changing situations and confronting

antagonists of every kind, from labor union officials to government bureaucrats, take a man seriously who chases after one half-understood idea after another and probably cannot even balance his own checkbook, to say nothing of giving another man a job or showing a profit at the end of the year and keeping the ship afloat in every kind of weather? The businessman may be justified in considering himself a better man than the intellectual, but it is the intellectual who has the last word. The intellectual is in a position to undermine the basis of order in society without the businessman, or society as a whole, for that matter, even being aware of what is going on. It is the man of business and affairs who has given the intellectual the source of his power and influence—the vast, elaborate communications network and the enormous system of mass education—but because he has little or no understanding of the role of ideas in the life of society, he has lost all control and influence over what he has created.

There is a further consideration in all this which should also not be forgotten: in any encounter between a professor or academic administrator and ordinary citizen, the latter is almost invariably at a hopeless disadvantage. The professor enters the fray with the great prestige, whether deserved or not, associated with learning and a life devoted to the higher things, while the ordinary citizen, who pays for it all, appears as the man who has spent his life grubbing for money. In addition, the professor, by the nature of his training and the practice of his profession, is far more skillful in expressing himself, in the use of words, than the average citizen. Some years ago, to give an example, a member of the state legislature of Illinois became concerned about what was going on in the universities, and, as we should know by now, with good reason. He made some speeches about Communism, which were probably wide of the mark, and instituted an investigation. One of the first witnesses to be called was the president of the University of Chicago, who, needless to say, was far

better equipped for such an encounter than any member of the legislature. When the question of communist influence in the universities came up, which was probably a rather insignificant factor in the problem, the university president innocently remarked that he didn't know much about Communism, would the chairman of the committee kindly explain it to him, give him a precise definition? None of the committee were able to make a satisfactory answer, even if they knew. The president of the university quickly made fools of the committee, the press was amused, and the world of intellectuals congratulated itself on having won another battle against the common man, but had it? The president of a university occupies a position of great honor and prestige, also of responsibility. Would it not have been better, and more in keeping with his position as the head of an educational institution the rest of the community supports, to have tried to help the members of the committee instead of making them appear foolish? There *was* something wrong with the universities, which the state legislator instinctively realized, even if he put his finger on the wrong place. Our whole situation, and that of the universities also, would be far better now if the universities, instead of contemptuously rejecting any form of criticism or questioning had taken an honest look at themselves from the standpoint of their true purpose and responsibility to society as a whole, but members of the academy are not, as a rule, characterized by the virtue of humility.

Perhaps the two words that best characterize the climate of opinion in our country in the period immediately following World War II are arrogance and its concomitant, self-delusion. We had played the decisive part in a great victory; our economic and military power were without equal. Hitler had ignominiously taken his own life, his Thousand-Year Reich was in ruins and had surrendered unconditionally. What was left of Germany was completely at our mercy. The situation of Japan was similar, but not

quite so drastic. Rather than ascribing victory to our vastly greater industrial and human resources, it was easy to believe, and we succumbed to the temptation, that it had come about because we were morally better.

In the war crimes trials following the war we set out not only to demonstrate the crimes of our enemies, but to establish a new concept of international law which would institute the reign of order between the nations, an order, based on law, which would be maintained by the United Nations under the benign influence and care of the two remaining great powers, the United States and Soviet Russia. To make it all seem plausible, certain facts had to be overlooked—war crimes, for example, and crimes against humanity were tacitly assumed to have been committed by the Axis powers alone, the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, which had paved the way for the outbreak of the war, and the support of the Axis powers by World Communism until Hitler's attack on Russia in 1941 were conveniently forgotten. Since the only morally admissible form of government was democracy, it was necessary to picture Soviet Russia as at least an incipient democracy—there was much talk of its “democratic” constitution, and of Stalin as a kindly father-figure: “Good old Uncle Joe.”

We provided Japan with a new, democratic constitution, and set out to “reeducate” the Germans; we were going to convert them from autocratic, goose-stepping Prussians into peace-loving democrats, in our image. Our democratic institutions, our free press, our system of education, had proven their superiority by our victory, and should be the model for the whole world,

and certainly for the countries we had defeated in the war which were now, it seemed, as putty in our hands.

Stability of international monetary relations was assured by the Bretton Woods Agreement. We would henceforth be masters of our own fate in monetary matters also; no longer would we be slaves to the vagaries of the gold standard. Gold, we were told on the highest authority, was a “barbarous relic,” and would henceforth be used only for filling teeth, wedding rings and other forms of jewelry.

In domestic matters it was assumed that we were equally successful in having found answers to the problems that had beset mankind for generations. A “full-employment” act was passed by the federal government which would banish the specter of unemployment. Since a college education had demonstrably helped some to obtain a better position in life, it would be made available to all—as a somewhat sceptical editorial writer put it at the time, the government was not only going to guarantee a college education for everyone, but that everyone would graduate at the head of his class. There were still a few problems, of course—“pockets of poverty” here and there, segregation in the South, inadequate education and medical care for some, but it was confidently believed that all these things could be taken care of by passing laws, by supreme court decisions, and new, imaginative government programs.

When all these things are taken into account, the reader will perhaps agree that I was not greatly overstating the case when I said: “World War II and the peace that followed it represented the final triumph of liberalism.”

<sup>1</sup>John Dos Passos, *Occasions and Protests* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964), p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald Berman, *America in the Sixties* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, with many examples, see Paul Hollander, “The Ideological Pilgrim,” *Encounter*, November 1973.

<sup>4</sup>Eliseo Vivas, *Two Roads to Ignorance* (Unpublished manuscript), Chapter VII, page 25.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted by Ronald Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>6</sup>George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967), p. 82.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph E. Davies, *Mission to Moscow*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1942), p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Kenner, *op. cit.*, p. 83

<sup>10</sup>Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Foreign Affairs*, April 1942.

<sup>13</sup>*Pacific Affairs*, March 1942.

<sup>14</sup>*The Saturday Review of Literature*, January 10, 1942.

<sup>15</sup>*The New Republic*, January 12, 1942.

<sup>16</sup>"These territorial changes seemed to me to be doubly pernicious, and the casual American acquiescence in them all the less forgivable, because of the fact that they served, like other territorial concessions to the Russians, simply to extract great productive areas from the economy of Europe and to permit the Russians, for reasons of their own military and political convenience, to deny these areas and their resources to the general purposes of European reconstruction . . . . The disaster that befell this area [East Prussia] with the entry of Soviet forces has no parallel in modern European experience. There were considerable sections of it where, to judge by all existing evidence, scarcely a man, woman, or child of the indigenous population was left alive after the initial passage of Soviet forces." Kennan, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-265.

<sup>17</sup>Dos Passos, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>18</sup>From a letter to W. T. Couch from William Miller, quoted in "The Sainted Book Burners," *The Freeman*, April 1955, p. 423.

<sup>19</sup>*The New Republic*, January 1, 1945.

<sup>20</sup>*The Library Journal*, September 15, 1944.

<sup>21</sup>*Kirkus Book Review Service*, September 15, 1945.

<sup>22</sup>*New York Times*, December 9, 1945.

<sup>23</sup>Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>*New York Times*, February 22, 1948.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, March 22, 1948.

<sup>26</sup>*The Nation*, May 29, 1948.

<sup>27</sup>*Annals of the American Academy*, July 1948.

<sup>28</sup>Weaver, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup>F. A. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism," *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Spring 1949, reprinted in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 178.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1942), p. 147.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup>Hayek, *op. cit.* p. 184.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup>Vivas, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>40</sup>Eric Voegelin, "On Classical Studies," *Modern Age*, Winter 1973.