

with a more inclusive exploration of the South's special relation to certain features of English thought. And, as Davis insists, we will need editions of previously neglected materials. But in these labors we will enjoy the advantage of the guidance Davis has

provided in *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*. All Southerners wearied of the customary and malicious distortions of their inheritance will, moreover, owe to him a personal debt. By the patria he has done very well indeed. Let us honor what he has made.

## *In the Public Interest*

W. T. COUCH

**Memoirs of a Dissident Publisher**, by Henry Regnery, *New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979. xxi + 260 pp. \$12.95.*

*TO DR. PANICHAS: Henry Regnery's thoroughly admirable dissent in my opinion calls for more than praise. It calls for most serious consideration of problems for which I fear there are no easy solutions. The most important of these I believe is: Why was it possible for President Franklin D. Roosevelt to follow during World War II a policy that built up the power of communism? This, of course, points toward many problems. I was so moved by Mr. Regnery's book that I wrote the following letter. It expresses better than would be possible in any other form my high opinion of him and his book.*

Dear Henry,

I finished reading your *Memoirs of A Dissident Publisher* several days ago and I have spent several days since thinking over the problem that your book and your work as publisher seem to me to pose. Your work as publisher, as I have watched it over many years from about the middle forties, seemed to me about as nearly in accord with the best in the great tradition of the Western World as it is perhaps possible for the work of a human being on this earth to be. I don't mean by this

that I was always in agreement with you—I, for instance, was an interventionist in World War II, but not an interventionist unlimited. I held that both Hitler's National Socialism and Stalin's Communism were terribly serious threats to civilized life, that both had to be defeated, and that the necessary role for us was that of the outside balancer in a struggle for power. By "outside," I do not mean completely outside. I mean sufficiently far inside to see that neither Hitler nor Stalin won, that, on the contrary, each destroyed the other and gave the people of both Russia and Germany another chance. I was, or so I thought, under no illusions on the dangers in a balance of power policy. No policy, I was and am convinced, is ever possible that is free from dangers in great affairs.

I was, however, under the illusion that a balance of power policy was the policy Roosevelt would follow. It was, of course, obvious early that he felt it necessary to deceive the American public. This alarmed and puzzled me—but it did not alarm me enough. (One reason for this is that I knew one cannot follow a balance of power policy successfully and advertise this intention.) It occurred to me, but not seriously until early 1943, that Roosevelt was going much too far in his support of Stalin. I do not remember when I began wondering whether he had put Japan in a position of either starving or attacking the United States. If I remember

correctly, I have already told you that during 1940 and up to December 7, 1941, I was doing volunteer work for the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. When Stalin attacked Finland, I did the same for Fighting Funds for Finland. I became disgusted when it became evident that the only way to get the public interested was to use famous movie stars to draw crowds; but I was too deeply involved to quit, kept my disgust to myself until the Japanese settled this problem for me on December 7, 1941. I should add that I was as disgusted with myself as I was with the public.

I repeat, I saw Stalin's Communism as just as much in need of defeat—I mean overwhelming defeat—as Hitler's National Socialism. Roosevelt had the chance to use the power of the United States so that each would destroy the other. This would be to serve the people of Germany and Russia and the rest of the world. This opportunity was to me so obvious, so clearly to the interest of the civilized world, that I did not understand at the time, and I do not understand now, how it was that, whatever Roosevelt's commitment, he was allowed by those around him to do anything else. A small, determined group from those around him could have stopped him and made him reverse his course. Not to do this was for those around him to share the responsibility for what he did. Dissenters around Hitler knew they faced death if they let their dissent be known. Dissent with Roosevelt could have brought only dismissal if the dissent failed to get enough agreement among others to force Roosevelt to change his course. Just how it was that Roosevelt was surrounded only with men who never offered him serious opposition at the time when opposition was most needed, and that Hitler had among those around him some who knowingly risked and suffered death for opposition, seems to me to say a lot about the kind of character being cultivated in the United States and that cultivated in Germany. This is one of the factors that made the war crimes trials an appalling caricature of justice to me. To be a yes-man for Hitler, to follow his orders and commit crimes against civilized

life, this warranted long prison terms or death; but to do the same for Roosevelt, this was to share the rewards of victory.

In my opinion, Roosevelt is far more of a riddle than Hitler. I cannot imagine any explanation of Roosevelt except an enormous ego accompanied by an equally enormous and utterly confident ignorance, a combination that amounted to diabolism.

Hitler is to me easy to understand in comparison with Roosevelt. Hitler is explainable by the Treaty of Versailles, the burden of reparations, the appalling unemployment and widespread suffering in Germany after 1929, etc. His fanaticism is strictly comparable to that of Roosevelt—except, and this is a large exception, he had some solid reasons for his fanaticism, whereas Roosevelt had none so far as I can see. Frank Knight says somewhere in one of his books that both Hitler and Roosevelt began high office with the same tasks: the employment of their people and the use of the power of the state in the effort to bring health to their economies. Hitler, if my impression is right, succeeded in this sooner and far better than Roosevelt. Both won the loyalty of the majorities in their countries in this effort.

Why did the Germans follow Hitler? You ask this question. Before I give my answer, let me give some background on myself. I had since my college days read widely in German from Luther to Hitler, had had Karl Hiersemann in Leipzig send me in the late twenties and early thirties periodicals in various fields, each large field for a period of about three months. During one three-month period, Hiersemann sent me, strictly in accordance with my instructions, periodicals dealing with current politics—among them organs of Hitler's National Socialism. When I read this stuff, I brushed it off: the German people will never give their support to Hitler. I had, during this period, gone through Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. I was, of course, completely wrong in my opinion. But then, as I soon realized, it was not clear that they had any choice other than Communism. If Hitler stays in power, I said to myself and a few others, this means war.

I had been an ardent Wilsonian and I still regard him as basically an honest man, one who was capable of deceiving himself with good intentions (so was I), but horrified when he found he had deceived the people of his own and other countries. When I began informing myself about his role in World War I, I was appalled. I don't remember when I first read Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. In my opinion, formed long ago after reading Keynes, Barnes, and a few others, David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, in their utterly unscrupulous part in the making of the Treaty of Versailles, and Wilson with his admirable intentions that opened the way for their unscrupulousness and vindictiveness, made Hitler's rise to power and World War II possible.

After Hitler had won overwhelming loyalty by creating jobs and a large measure of prosperity—after he had high office and all the power a normal person could want, he began the policy that said to the German people: I will not allow dissent: to dissent is to be an enemy of the German people. Dissent will not be tolerated. And dissenters were "liquidated." Hitler had early identified the Jews of Germany as targets for special hatred and "liquidation." Germans who stood for Jews were to be "liquidated" along with them. Now while Hitler's National Socialism became in one of its aspects the policy and practice of torture and murder on a tremendous scale, I could not see that there was any difference, so far as torture and murder were concerned, between Hitler's National Socialism and Lenin's and Stalin's Communism—except in numbers. Lenin's and Stalin's Communists tortured and starved or murdered four or five times as many as Hitler's National Socialists did.

I cannot condemn any German for not standing up and condemning Hitler, or any Russian for not doing the same on account of the mass torture, starving, and murdering in Russia because I, too, like most human beings, am not sure what I would do if my only choice were between being silent and giving at least outward assent to a policy I despised, or being tortured, shot, hung, or

being sent to a concentration or slave labor camp to die. I would, I fear, go along until I thought the time was ripe for standing up—that is, until real danger to me appeared to have weakened. But still, I couldn't escape having some contempt for myself.

None of the many people in high places around Roosevelt was in danger of physical torture, of being shot or hung for expressing dissent from Roosevelt's policy toward Communism. None could suffer more than loss of position and disgrace in the eyes of those committed to Roosevelt. How any as late as the first months of 1943 could not know his policy is to me all that needs to be said of the honesty and intelligence of most of the people around him. The best I can say for myself is that I did not know Roosevelt's real intentions, but by early 1943 I should have guessed. I could not imagine his real intentions and even today I find it impossible to understand why he did what he did—except that he did not understand and therefore could not defend the standards that he as President was sworn to defend.

I have to say, Henry, we do not come out very well in comparison with some Germans and Russians.

You earned my deep respect long ago, Henry, with the books you published. I often disagreed on minor points, but I never felt, when reading anything you published, this author is a four-flusher.

This letter is already much too long, but, before closing, I believe I should say I was with the University of Chicago Press from October 1, 1945, until November 20, 1950, and I have no recollection of being approached by the Great Books Foundation about the handling of its books. I'm fairly sure somebody else made the decision that the University of Chicago Press was not interested. I'm not surprised at this. The decision to get rid of me had been made during the Grodzins affair in 1948. I was unaware of this decision until two years later—stupid of me, but then I have never claimed not to have my stupidities. In fact, I was all during my five years at Chicago looking for books that had fairly sure markets.

One of my predecessors, Donald Bean, I believe, had established the Bible and an excellent collection of textbooks as the financial backbone of the Press. I tried hard early to get Hutchins interested in keeping this financial backbone in healthy condition. I knew I could not succeed with any policy in which he was not interested or to which he was actively opposed. He was opposed in general to textbooks, not interested in new and perhaps better editions of the Bible. I knew of his general feeling about textbooks before I went to Chicago, but it never occurred to me that he wouldn't understand the dire need of a strong financial backbone for the Press. He simply wasn't interested. I would have welcomed the chance to publish for the Great Books Foundation with its practically certain market.

I find the way in which the Great Books Foundation handled its relations with you just another example of disregard for the ordinary decencies and, worse, a case of outright dishonesty in which parties dependent on Hutchins seem to me often to have engaged. I can't help wondering whether Hutchins, with his readiness to provide Ford Foundation money to take the place of yours—or at least to provide enough—along with the threat of a costly suit—to make you accept the shift, was out for you. But however this may be, to penalize you for publishing Buckley's *God and Man at Yale* was inexcusable. If there has ever been a book that told the truth about anything, this book of Buckley's told it. Buckley made one mistake—the same one I made in the Grodzins affair. He couldn't imagine that telling an obvious truth about a university in a matter of great importance

would get no strong and determined support either in the university, or in its board, or among its alumni—that the only visible result would be to arouse anger against the one who violated the taboo against saying the obvious.

Your work as publisher, Henry, in my opinion has been as well conceived, as well done, as that of any of the authors you published. And you published some of the very best books on topics of the very greatest importance at the time—and still of the very greatest importance. The *Memoirs of A Dissident Publisher* is to me an account of superb, honest and intelligent, deeply and firmly inspired work in the public interest. One might wonder why it is that our universities, supposed in former times, if not now, to exist in order to serve truth, have not only not led in this work but have in the main been indifferent when not opposed to it.

Thank you, Henry, for your work and your book about your work.

Cordially yours,  
Bill

P.S. After reading your *Memoirs*, I picked up one of the two dozen or so of your books I have. This one, Crocker, *Roosevelt's Road to Russia*, I read for the first time with intense interest. Excellent. After reading it, I read the biography of Roosevelt in the *New* (1974) *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. I found only the most remote reflection of the carefully documented account Crocker gives. The author, Frank Freidel, history, Harvard, quotes at the end of the article from Roosevelt of 1932 that "The presidency . . . is pre-eminently a place of moral leadership" and says this "remained Roosevelt's view through peace and war."