

THE NEW LEFT AND THE RIGHT



THE THIRD WORLD WAR

A conservative friend of mine who does a good deal of professional talking mentioned the other day that on discussion programs, lately, he is often pitted with a liberal and a New Leftist. "In the old days," he said, "I was always battling a liberal-Old Left united front. With the current setup, I usually find myself ganged up with the New Leftist against the liberal." My friend is not alone in having noted a seeming affinity between New Left and Right.

In an article ("Confessions of a Right-Wing Liberal") appropriately published in *Ramparts* (June 15 issue), Professor Murray N. Rothbard recounts how it came about that one who "twenty years ago was an extreme right-wing Republican" is today happy writing for *Ramparts* and convinced that "if we would salvage liberty . . . this needs to be done by a counter-fusion of old right and new left." I doubt Professor Rothbard will comprehend the chuckles with which *Ramparts'* sophisticated readers will savor the naiveté of his face-saving boast that "my basic political views have not changed by a single iota in these two decades!"

It is not surprising that critics of the status quo who differ among themselves should make the same negative points. The critics naturally select the most vulnerable and distasteful traits for emphasis. These negative coincidences may be of theoretical interest but they do not have much political significance. Politics cannot be understood by examining the abstract content of the formulas used. *Everyone*, after all, is for Liberty, Justice, Peace and Prosperity.

The New Left teaches us by its acts the real meaning of its political doctrine. We have had a chance to observe embryonic New Left societies—soviets—at Berkeley, Howard, Columbia, Rome, West Berlin, Chicago, the Sorbonne, various draft boards and city halls. We

learn that New Left "participatory democracy" means the coercion—by putsch tactics, "intoxication," violence—of the majority by a self-nominated minority elite; that the romantically anarchic New Left freedoms include the freedom to defame, assault and imprison opponents, to deface and destroy the structures, records and artifacts of the existing social order.

At the Barricades

The fundamental aim of conservatives is to preserve the inherited structure of civilization against the continuous threat of barbarism; meanwhile, if possible, to improve that structure, but first, to preserve. Fundamentally, conservatives criticize liberalism because its practices weaken the institutional defense against barbarism and its ideas sap the will to resist barbarism. But the real Left—the revolutionary, Communist Left, New as Old—is of a different order. Its specific objective is to overthrow, to destroy what it calls "capitalism," the establishment, "the status quo," "the consumer society"—all meaning the existing structure of such civilization as we have been able to manage. Of course the destruction is in the name of a new and higher kind of society, but that does not alter its nihilistic relation to the civilized order we know and have.

It follows that conservative opposition to the revolutionary Left is strategic and total, whereas its opposition to liberalism is tactical and contingent. (I am dealing here with *political* opposition, not with philosophical differences, which might be judged "total"—i.e., entailing logical incompatibility—in both cases.) There cannot be an honest united front between conservatives and New Leftists against liberals. As against the New Leftists, conservatives should rather seek to join forces with liberals; should be ready, if necessary, to defend liberals against New Left attacks.

The ultimate meaning of political relationships is revealed in the ultimate test: a revolutionary situation. On which side of the barricades do you line up? The revolutionary situation in France this spring again confirmed that conservatives and New Leftists line up, inevitably, on opposite sides of the barricades. Liberals hesitate, mill around and in the end divide, the proportion on each side being determined by the course of the struggle.

Beware: Optimists Present!

Some persons on the American Right have been confused by the New Left's seeming adherence to a "libertarianism" similar to their own. But libertarianism does not define a distinctive political position. With respect to many rights and liberties the Warren Court has been much more libertarian than anyone on the Right. In these matters of rights and liberties, what differentiates conservatives from radicals and revolutionaries, and Right from Left, is the attitude toward economic rights, "property rights," which do not appear on any left-wing litany.

Actually, the new Left's libertarianism is a verbal façade. The Leninist Left also declared that through the revolution "proletarian democracy" would replace the fakery of a "bourgeois democracy" which in fact is capitalist dictatorship; and that proletarian democracy would evolve into the complete freedom of Communist society. The outcome of New Left as of Old Left prescriptions must in practice be totalitarian despotism. "During the Terror [of the great French Revolution]," observed George Sorel, "the men who spilt most blood were precisely those who had the greatest desire to let their equals enjoy the golden age they had dreamt of, and who had the most sympathy with human wretchedness: optimists, idealists and sensitive men, the greater desire they had for universal happiness the more inexorable they showed themselves." □

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