

THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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CREDIBILITY AND POLARIZATION

Intellectual confusion is the hallmark of the twentieth century, induced by those whose task is to provide enlightenment: by modern intellectuals.

One of their methods is the destruction of language - and, therefore, of thought and, therefore, of communication - by means of anti-concepts. An anti-concept is an unnecessary and rationally unusable term designed to replace and obliterate some legitimate concept. The use of anti-concepts gives the listeners a sense of approximate understanding. But in the realm of cognition, nothing is as bad as the approximate. If, loaded with too many approximations, you find yourself giving up the attempt to understand today's world, check your premises and the words you are hearing. To understand what one hears and reads today requires a special translation.

Now to introduce myself, in this context. Philosophically, I am an advocate of reason. Practically, my task is to demonstrate that man needs philosophy in order to discover the proper way to live on earth. Journalistically, part of my task is to serve as a translator by identifying, whenever necessary, the meaning of the worst anti-concepts in our cultural smog. Colloquially, in this respect, call me a bromide-buster.

One of today's fashionable anti-concepts is "polarization." Its meaning is not very clear, except that it is something bad - undesirable, socially destructive, evil - something that would split the country into irreconcilable camps and conflicts. It is used mainly in political issues and serves as a kind of "argument from intimidation": it replaces a discussion of the merits (the truth or falsehood) of a given idea by the menacing accusation that such an idea would "polarize" the country - which is supposed to make one's opponents retreat, protesting that they didn't mean it. Mean - what?

"Polarization" is a term borrowed from physics; a dictionary defines "polarity" as: "the presence or manifestation of two opposite or contrasting principles or tendencies." (Random House Dictionary, 1966.)

Transplanted from the realm of physics to the realm of social issues, this term means a situation in which men hold "opposite or contrasting" views or ideas (principles), and goals or values (tendencies). When used as a pejorative term, this means that men should not differ in their views, ideas, goals and values, that such differences are evil, that men must not disagree.

This notion is propagated by the same intellectuals who denounce con-

formity, decry the status quo, clamor for change, and proclaim that the right to dissent includes the right to implement it by physical force.

But - the anti-polarizers might protest - they do not object to all disagreements: the key term in the above definition is "principles"; which is true. It is principles - fundamental principles - that they are struggling to eliminate from public discussion. It is a clash of fundamental principles that the term "polarization" is intended to hide and to avert. Fundamental principles, they feel, must be accepted uncritically - on faith, by "instinct," by implication, by emotional commitment - and must never be named or questioned. No, they do not mind dissent and differences - such differences as between St. Peter and St. Paul, or Auguste Comte and Karl Marx, or Senator Muskie and Senator Kennedy. But do not dare bring up the differences between Aristotle and Marcuse, or Adam Smith and J.M. Keynes, or George Washington and Richard M. Nixon. This would polarize the country, they cry. And it sure would.

The most timid, frightened, conservative defenders of the status quo - of the intellectual status quo - are today's liberals (the leaders of the conservatives never ventured into the realm of the intellect). What they dread to discover is the fact that the intellectual status quo they inherited is bankrupt, that they have no ideological base to stand on and no capacity to construct one. Brought up on the philosophy of Pragmatism, they have been taught that principles are unprovable, impractical or non-existent - which has destroyed their ability to integrate ideas, to deal with abstractions, and to see beyond the range of the immediate moment. Abstractions, they claim, are "simplistic" (another anti-concept); myopia is sophisticated. "Don't polarize!" and "Don't rock the boat!" are expressions of the same kind of panic.

It is doubtful - even in the midst of today's intellectual decadence - that one could get away with declaring explicitly: "Let us abolish all debate on fundamental principles!" (though some men have tried it). If, however, one declares: "Don't let us polarize," and suggests a vague image of warring camps ready to fight (with no mention of the fight's object), one has a chance to silence the mentally weary. The use of "polarization" as a pejorative term means: the suppression of fundamental principles. Such is the pattern of the function of anti-concepts.

The leaders of today's intellectuals are probably aware of the fact that the injunction to avoid polarization means that unity - a nation's unity - must be given priority over reason, logic and truth, which is a fundamental principle of collectivism. But the rank-and-file intellectuals are not aware of it: it is too abstract a conclusion. Like children and savages, they believe that human wishes are omnipotent, that everything would be all right if only we'd all agree on it, and that anything can be solved by cooperation, negotiation and compromise.

This has been the ruling doctrine in our political, academic and intellectual life for the last fifty years or longer, with no noteworthy dissenters but one: reality.

The ideal of "consensus" did not work. It did not lead to social harmony among men, or security or confidence or unity or mutual understanding and good will. It has led us to a general sense of hostility, of fear, uncertainty, lethargy, bitterness, cynicism, and a growing mistrust of everyone by everyone.

The same intellectuals who advocate non-polarization, are now deploring the "credibility gap." They do not realize that the latter is the unavoidable consequence of the former.

If clear-cut principles, unequivocal definitions and inflexible goals are barred from public discussion, then a speaker or writer has to struggle to hide his meaning (if any) under coils of meaningless generalities and safely popular bromides. Regardless of whether his message is good or bad, true or false, he cannot state it openly, but must smuggle it into his audience's subconscious by means of the same unfocused, deceptive, evasive verbiage. He must strive to be misunderstood in the greatest number of ways by the greatest number of people: this is the only way to keep up the pretense of unity.

If, in such conditions, people are urged to cooperate, negotiate or compromise, how are they to do it? How can they cooperate, if their common goal is not named explicitly? How can they negotiate, if the intentions of the various men or groups involved are not revealed? How can they know, when they compromise, whether they have made a reasonable deal or sold out their future? Since there is no way to do it - since concrete problems cannot even be grasped, let alone judged or solved, without reference to abstract principles - men begin to regard social relationships not as a matter of dealing with one another, but of putting something over on one another. And the worst of it is not that this policy turns the men who act in good faith into easy prey for the frauds and the manipulators. The worst of it is the genuine misunderstandings between honest men who take the loose verbiage to mean two opposite things. If there is a surer way to breed mistrust and bitterness, I do not know of it.

In politics, the intellectuals profess their desire "to make democracy work" and their devotion to the will of the people as expressed by vote. How are people to choose or trust their representatives in an age of non-polarizing language? A parliamentary system stands or falls on the quality - the precision - of public communication (and its precondition: the freedom of public information). A program, platform, promise, or forecast of the future cannot be offered except in terms of explicitly defined principles - and such principles are the people's only means of ascertaining whether a candidate has kept his word or not. In the last decades, people have become cynically accustomed to ignoring the empty catch phrases of campaign oratory and to voting on the basis of implications. But this does not work - as has been demonstrated definitively by Mr. Nixon, who made a U-turn on a dime (or on a paper dollar), discarding overnight every approximate principle he was approximately believed to stand for. (I shall discuss Mr. Nixon's performance in a subsequent Letter.) Whatever our politicians now talk about, they had better not talk about reviving anyone's "faith in the democratic process" or about credibility.

In the absence of intellectual polarization, we are witnessing the growth of the ugliest kind of divisiveness or existential polarization, if you will: pressure-group warfare. The country is splitting into dozens of blind, deaf, but screaming camps, each drawn together not by loyalty to an idea, but by the accident of race, age, sex, religious creed, or the frantic whim of a given moment - not by values held in common, but by a common hatred of some other group - not by choice, but by terror.

When men abandon principles (i.e., their conceptual faculty), two of the major results are: individually, the inability to project the future; socially, the impossibility of communication. Trapped in a maze of immediate problems,

with no means of grasping the context, causes, consequences or solutions, men seek a way out by ganging up on one another, which means: by accepting brute physical force as the ultimate arbiter of disputes. A shrunken, range-of-the-moment mentality sees other men as the immediate cause of its troubles; it can see no further; forcing its demands on others is the only answer it can grasp. But these others, acting on the same non-principle, gang up to retaliate and to force their demands, which leads their intended victims to gang up, and so on. Who is the ultimate victim? The smallest minority on earth: the individual - which means: every man qua man.

Is there a solution? Yes. In its present state, what this country needs above all is the clarifying, reassuring, confidence-and-credibility-inspiring guidance of fundamental principles - i.e., in modern parlance, intellectual polarization.

This would bring to our cultural atmosphere an all-but-forgotten quality: honesty, with its corollary, clarity. It would establish the minimum requirement of civilized discourse: that the proponents of ideas strive to make themselves understood and lay all their cards on the table (including their axioms). It would leave no significant audience or influence to those who specialize in the unintelligible, or preach blatant contradictions, or proclaim ends with total unconcern for means, or hold fundamental principles they would not dare name openly, or disseminate anti-concepts. It would enable men to know their own stand and that of their adversaries. It would enable them to make conscious choices and to take the consequences - or to change their course, when proved wrong. What they would regain is the power to understand, to consider, to judge - and to communicate with one another. What they would lose is the sense of suffocating in a smog of impotent bewilderment.

What if men disagree, you ask? No open disagreement can be as destructive as the secret, nameless, virulent hostility now splintering this country.

But isn't unity desirable, you ask? Unity is a consequence, not a primary. The unity of a lynch mob, of Nazi storm troopers or of the Soviet press is not desirable. Only fundamental principles, rationally validated, clearly understood and voluntarily accepted, can create a desirable kind of unity among men.

But such principles cannot be defined, you say? Check your premises and those of the speakers who told you so. There is a science whose task is to discover and define fundamental principles. It is the forgotten, neglected, subverted and currently disgraced base of all the other sciences: philosophy.

Ayn Rand

THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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"THE MORATORIUM ON BRAINS"

"Hell, what it comes down to is that we can manage to exist as and where we are, but we can't afford to move! So we've got to stand still. We've got to stand still. We've got to make those bastards stand still!"

If you have read Atlas Shrugged, you know the meaning - and the relevance - of this quotation. If you have not, I suggest that you read the first sequence of Chapter VI, Part II. It will give you some idea of the political motives, philosophical goals, psychological mechanisms, intellectual stature, and moral dignity behind an event such as the wage-price freeze of August 15, 1971. But please do not think that that sequence is literary naturalism, a journalistic report on the conference at Camp David on August 13-14, with the names changed to protect the guilty. It was published fourteen years ago.

If one knows the principles behind a given policy, one can predict the direction it will take and the ultimate results. Besides, the progression of this particular policy has been repeated in country after country, with consequences that no one but a modern newsman could take as news.

The special twist, in the case of Mr. Nixon, is that his counterparts on the road to statism in other countries were not elected to office on the implicit promise to save the country from a statist trend. In spite of the usual pragmatist evasions, it was clear to his supporters and enemies alike that he was elected as a champion - or semi-champion - of free enterprise. If one needs factual proof of the danger of implicit promises, unnamed hopes, undeclared principles - i.e., of the futility and impracticality of playing it short-range - Mr. Nixon is the proof. He is an immortal refutation of Pragmatism.

The worst thing one can say about Mr. Nixon is that he is sincere. A clever demagogue would not believe that one can protect a country's freedom by establishing the foundation, the principle and the precedent of a totalitarian dictatorship. Mr. Nixon, apparently, does.

It used to be widely believed that the election of a semi-conservative (a "moderate") is a way of gaining time and delaying the statist advance. President Eisenhower proved the opposite; President Nixon proved it conclusively. Their policies have not delayed, but helped and accelerated the march to statism. A major reason is the silencing and destruction of the opposition. If Mr. Nixon's program had been proposed by a liberal Democrat, the Republicans would have screamed their heads off - either on some remnant of principle or, at least, on the grounds of narrow party interests. But when total economic controls are imposed by a Republican President - in the name of preserving free enterprise -

who, among today's politicians, is going to protest and in the name of what?

Mr. Nixon's lip service to free enterprise is the most offensive aspect of his performance. It is adding insult to injury - if one considers his estimate of the people's intelligence. But this is an objective conclusion, i.e., a conclusion based on judging statements by their relation to facts. It is not Mr. Nixon's viewpoint: he does not see it as lip service, he means it. As a pragmatist, he believes that anything is "free enterprise" if we believe it is, and nothing is "dictatorship" if we don't use that name. To him, apparently, voluntary enslavement is neither a contradiction in terms nor the vilest form of self-abasing pretense; it is the central concept, the theme, the hope and the plea of his new economic policy.

"I am today ordering a freeze on all prices and wages throughout the United States for a period of ninety days," declared Mr. Nixon in the briefest paragraph of his speech on August 15 - thus paralyzing the initiative, extinguishing the prospects, wiping out the plans, abrogating the contracts, obliterating the personal choice, judgment and control over his own life of every individual in this country. A country in which a government official has the power to do this, is not a free country.

"It is temporary," he explained, two paragraphs later. "To put the strong vigorous American economy into a permanent strait jacket would lock in unfairness; it would stifle the expansion of our free-enterprise system..." How is a temporary strait jacket going to foster expansion? No answer - unless you take the following as an implicit answer: if a man could manage to put on a strait jacket all by himself, it would not hamper his freedom of movement. But he can't, you say? Mr. Nixon thinks that a nation can. "I am relying on the voluntary cooperation of all Americans..." he declared in the next paragraph. "Working together, we will break the back of inflation, and we will do it without the mandatory wage and price controls that crush economic and personal freedom."

This means: if you don't move, if you stand still, your freedom will not be crushed.

("Say," asked Kinnan, 'how is the emergency to end if everything is to stand still?' 'Don't be theoretical,' said Mouch impatiently. 'We've got to deal with the situation of the moment.'" This is from the above-mentioned conference in Atlas Shrugged.)

Counting, apparently, on the concrete-bound mentality of pragmatists, Mr. Nixon tried to reassure the country by asserting that dictatorial power is not dictatorial power if it is not embodied in the physical shape of a swarm of men. "While the wage-price freeze will be backed by Government sanctions, if necessary, it will not be accompanied by the establishment of a huge price-control bureaucracy." This is worse than control by bureaucracy, and this is the meaning Mr. Nixon attaches to the term "voluntary": control by fear.

Either in the belief that his audience was asleep, or as a final seal on the fact that words do not mean anything to anyone any longer, Mr. Nixon permitted himself the following: "Freedom brought America where it is today and freedom is the road to the future for America" - in an address asking Congress to help him abolish the last of it. (September 9.)

The purpose of the freeze, Mr. Nixon kept repeating, is to stop infla-

tion. But what is the cause of inflation? There is only one cause, as the science of economics and the history of wrecked economies have demonstrated time and time again: the expansion of the money supply to finance government spending. Mr. Nixon almost admitted as much. "We have paid out nearly \$150-billion in foreign aid, economic and military, over the past twenty-five years," he explained in his speech to Congress.

If you are now asked to "tighten your belt," to forgo a raise you had counted on and earned, to lower your expectations and your standard of living, to accept a bleak future with no advance or improvement in sight, remember that foreign aid is the drain down which your work, your hope and your freedom have been poured. (There were other, domestic drains in the past twenty-five years, such as the welfare-state programs. Now the U.S. dollar, like a rubber check, is bouncing, marked: "Account overdrawn.")

Mr. Nixon did not condemn the policy of his predecessors. "We have done this," he declared in the same speech, "because we are America, and America is a good and a generous nation." Sentimentality is embarrassing, even in cheap popular songs that use some such line as "because you're you." But to hear that sort of explanation in regard to a national tragedy, goes painfully beyond embarrassment.

That line, however, is a clue to the deeper cause of the disaster.

Unlike his counterparts in other lands, Mr. Nixon had no scapegoat to blame for our troubles. He merely hinted darkly at some undefined "international money speculators" who are somehow responsible for it all. (Which raises the question of how did the makers of our foreign policy leave this country's fate at the mercy of such "speculators" and of any moment's panic.) But look for the deeper cause.

You can see its claw-prints all over Mr. Nixon's speeches - the rusty claw in a marshmallow glove, which is the insignia of altruism. No one could hope to get away with those speeches, or with the policy they proclaimed, or with the decades of suicidal policies that led to it, if it were not for the magic power of the call to self-sacrifice - not the power of people's belief in it (nobody believes in it), but worse: the power of people's fear to admit that they don't.

Mr. Nixon set the tone and example of that fear, apparently to reassure any moral cannibals, foreign or domestic, who have become used to human sacrifices: "The time has come to be ourselves again - still compassionate, pouring out our wealth to all of those in need around the world, when we can. Still with a sense of responsibility toward others in the world, still ready to help those who need help." This - at a time of national financial disaster. (Speech to the Knights of Columbus, August 17.)

"But the United States of America, at this time in history, must maintain the strength in the free world" - Because we have the right to exist? No - "to provide the help that others aren't able to provide for themselves." (Ibid.)

"What's happening to the willingness for self-sacrifice that enabled us to build a great nation, to the moral code that made self-reliance a part of the American character, to the competitive spirit that made it possible for us to lead the world?" (Labor Day speech, September 6.)

The proper answer is: You're happening, Mr. President - and a long, long

line of men who taught you these notions.

But Mr. Nixon's philosophical ancestors knew better than to offer a combination of this kind and worked very hard to undercut man's self-reliance. They knew that self-reliance is the antithesis of self-sacrifice. Self-reliance is a product of self-esteem, and a man of self-esteem does not regard himself as a sacrificial animal; the man who does, has nothing to rely on. It's either-or.

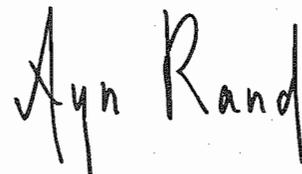
To preach self-reliance in the context of a government edict tying men hand and foot, would be sadistic cruelty, if anyone took it seriously. But most people do not even hear it; they accept it by conditioned reflex.

As to the notion of "competitive spirit," it is an interesting clue to Mr. Nixon's dilemma: he was obviously struggling to whip up a crusade, and a crusade requires something strong, uplifting, inspiring, but the concept he needed - since he was calling for productivity - is taboo in the altruist code: personal ambition. So he picked a ludicrous substitute, a nonessential which is shameful if and when it serves as a primary motive: competitiveness. Competition is a by-product of productive work, not its goal. A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others. And with whom does Mr. Nixon want us to compete? With those same foreign countries we are supposed to serve self-sacrificially? Or are we asked to help them get on their feet in order to punch them in the jaw as soon as they stand up - as, for instance, West Germany and Japan?

But even this image of an envy-ridden, "competitive" second-hander as a national ideal is better than the following catalog of inspirational goals: "We need a healthy and productive economy in order to achieve the great goals to which we all are so firmly committed: To help those who cannot help themselves. To feed the hungry. To provide better health care for the sick. To provide better education for our children. To provide more fully for the aged. To restore and renew our natural environment, and to provide more and better jobs and more and greater opportunity for all of our people." (Address to Congress.)

Who is missing from this hospital litany? The men who are missing from all of Mr. Nixon's speeches, policies and concerns, the men whose existence, character and needs are never mentioned or acknowledged: the men who are expected to provide it all. The men who do not join an "aristocracy of pull," do not seek favors, do not function by permission, do not bargain with government boards, and do not cooperate at the point of a gun: the men of creative ability, of intelligence, integrity and ambition - the Atlases who have been shrugging and vanishing for many decades (by psychological necessity, not by conscious choice).

I shall discuss the public reaction, Phase Two and what we may now expect of the future - in my next Letter.



THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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"THE MORATORIUM ON BRAINS"

Part II

The public reaction to the wage-price freeze was a significant indication of this country's intellectual state.

The general public's response was, predominantly, approval. It could not be claimed that this indicates popular approval of statism: few people would understand the meaning - and the necessary consequences - of the freeze, particularly when a chorus of bipartisan voices assures them that freedom is not endangered. But what the popular reaction does indicate is the preamble to statism: ignorance, helplessness, confusion, despair. People sense that the country cannot go on in its present state much longer - and feel blindly that somebody ought to "do something" about it. The danger is the "do something," i.e., the uncritical reliance on action, any action, in order to be pulled out of the growing chaos, the hysterical screaming, and the gray, silent crumbling wrought by the spreading quicksands of a mixed economy.

The reaction of the country's political leaders was just as ominous, but less innocent.

Discussing the views of what it describes as "a host of distinguished grandstand quarterbacks" in Washington, a story in the New York Times (September 5) indicates general approval of the freeze, then reports on answers to some questions. "'Should the freeze be followed by a full-scale program of wage-price control, with the issuance of daily regulations on everything from the price of pickles to the wages of household servants?' The answer was an almost universal no. No witness before Congress favored it. The President has long been appalled by the idea." (Emphasis mine.)

I do not know what convolutions of Jamesian-Keynesian fog enable those national leaders to evade the knowledge that the course they have chosen leads of necessity to full-scale controls. But I do believe that most of them do not want a totalitarian economy - and this is one tragic aspect of today's situation: we are being pushed to destruction not by avowed enemies, but by reluctant destroyers.

It is Pragmatism that permits them to hope to avoid, somehow, the

consequences of their own policies, to find a loophole in the law of causality, to have their freedom and eat it, too. Later, when they are trapped by the consequences they refused to consider, they will call for controls and more controls, crying that they didn't mean it and couldn't help it. This is the way it happened in other countries.

As to the reaction of the major economic groups, it was American industry that welcomed the freeze, and labor that did not. Labor, in fact, was the only significant group that opposed Mr. Nixon's edict with properly righteous defiance - and obtained some (temporary) concessions.

According to the Times (August 17): "Many [businessmen] hailed particularly the psychological lift they anticipated from the 'decisive' program to tackle basic economic problems." "This series of moves 'lanced the boil of pessimism,'" said one of them. "'An important aspect of [Nixon's] program is the elimination of uncertainty,'" said another, believe it or not. It is the government's arbitrary, unpredictable, unanswerable power that he hailed as a cure for uncertainty (and this right after Mr. Nixon's series of sudden reversals).

In regard to the future "review" board, George Meany "has made plain labor's preference - even insistence - on a tripartite structure [i.e., equal numbers of union, industry and "public" representatives]. Industry leaders have given equally strong - though much less public - notice that they would prefer an all-Government board." (The Times, September 6.)

As a group, businessmen have been withdrawing for decades from the ideological battlefield, disarmed by the deadly combination of altruism and Pragmatism. Their public policy has consisted in appeasing, compromising and apologizing: appeasing their crudest, loudest antagonists; compromising with any attack, any lie, any insult; apologizing for their own existence. Abandoning the field of ideas to their enemies, they have been relying on lobbying, i.e., on private manipulations, on pull, on seeking momentary favors from government officials. Today, the last group one can expect to fight for capitalism is the capitalists.

Organized labor has been much more sensitive to the danger of government power and much more aware of ideological issues. Its spokesmen have fought the government in proper, morally confident terms whenever they saw a threat to their rights. (To name a few examples of such occasions: the attempt at labor conscription in World War II, the issue of U.S. contributions to the Soviet-dominated International Labor Organization, President Kennedy's attempt to impose guidelines in the steel crisis of 1962.) Labor's concern was aroused only in defense of its rights; still, whoever defends his own rights defends the rights of all. But labor was pursuing a contradictory policy, which could not be maintained for long. In many issues - notably in its support of welfare-state legislation - labor violated the rights of others and fertilized the growth of the government's power. And, today, labor is in line to become the next major victim of advancing statism.

It was business, not labor, that initiated the policy of government intervention in the economy (as long ago as the nineteenth century) - and business was the first victim. Labor adopted the same policy and will

meet the same fate. He who lives by a legalized sword, will perish by a legalized sword.

Today's freeze is obviously directed against labor. The "wage-price spiral," which is merely a consequence of inflation, is being blamed as its cause, thus deflecting the blame from the real culprit: the government. But the government's guilt is hidden by the esoteric intricacies of the national budget and of international finance - which the public cannot be expected to understand - while the disaster of nationwide strikes is directly perceivable by everyone and gives plausibility to the public's growing resentment of labor unions.

Furthermore, the theoretical (partly Marxist) foundation of labor's confidence has withered away. Organized labor is not the "exploited" underdog any longer, it is a prosperous middle class, systematically attacked and undercut by the Lumpenproletariat: the intellectuals of the New Left. In economic fact, organized labor is not responsible for the inflationary spiral, but - since labor is backed by compulsory unionization - it is responsible for unemployment. Thus there is an unidentified ground for the public's resentment, which the statisticians are exploiting to their own advantage and which labor's once courageous theoreticians dare not face - just as the advocates of governmental favors to business did not (and do not) dare face the contradictions of their case.

Now, we have reached the logical climax of a mixed economy: the stage at which the unlimited power of the government is the only ideological constant in the tangled, switching theoretical equipment of all social groups. The manifestations of the tangle are all around us. Mr. Nixon believes that as long as he tries to protect industry's profits, he is protecting free enterprise. Businessmen hail the freeze because they believe that this particular administration is more sympathetic to their interests than to labor's (with no thought of what will happen to them at the hands of another administration, a year or, at most, five years from now). And labor, in the person of George Meany, declares that the freeze is "a form of socialism for big business" (which is true), then proceeds to demand a freeze on profits, while demanding more social benefits and more jobs. (To be financed and provided by what and by whom? Blank out.)

There is a name for a system of "socialism for big business": it is called fascism. I have stated repeatedly that the trend in this country is toward a fascist system with communist slogans. But what all of today's pressure groups are busy evading is the fact that neither business nor labor nor anyone else, except the ruling clique, gains anything under fascism or communism or any form of statism - that all become victims of an impartial, egalitarian destruction.

By what is probably a curious coincidence, Mr. Nixon called the freeze a "new economic policy," and the press has accepted the name, along with the abbreviation "N.E.P." These were the names of the Soviet policy introduced by Lenin in 1921, after a period of strict military communism. The significant difference is this: in Russia, the original N.E.P. and its later variants, prompted by economic crises, consisted in lifting some controls and allowing the citizens a modicum of freedom, in order to revive some degree of productivity (after which the controls were clamped

down again, until the next crisis). In the U.S., the N.E.P., prompted by an economic crisis, consists in imposing controls on the remnants of freedom. In this respect, the Soviet rulers seem to have a better understanding of economics.

The American people's precarious acceptance of the freeze rests on a single, false premise: that the government knows what it is doing. A great deal of evasion is required not to notice the open admissions to the contrary: Mr. Nixon, his associates, the commentators, the press have been speaking of bold experimentation, of imagination, of improvisation, of "flexibility." In this pragmatist laboratory, we are the guinea pigs. And while the people hope that the government will "do something," the government hopes that the people will "do something" somehow to make the unworkable work.

The program announced as "Phase Two" confirms the fact that the government has no program. The Times (October 9) describes it as follows: "Faced with contrary pressures from special interest groups for a Phase Two wage-price program tailored to differing desires, President Nixon is seeking to resolve the conflicts by giving all sides a little something to cheer about....Mr. Nixon came up with a tripartite board on pay, a public commission on prices and rents, and a Government council over both groups along with built-in uncertainty as to which group will exercise greater authority. 'It's ingenious,' declared a lobbyist for one segment of the nation's banking community....And one official of the Cost of Living Council, acknowledging White House efforts to satisfy everyone, observed succinctly, 'Smart man, that President.'" (Emphasis mine.)

These boards have been given an unlimited and undefined power over the entire economy - without any standards, principles or rules to guide their edicts. Their edicts, we are told, are to be fair (i.e., just) and flexible (i.e., arbitrary), which is a contradiction in terms. There is only one standard of justice in the field of economics: the verdict of a free market. No other standard can be or has ever been defined. In the absence of a standard, these boards can be guided by nothing but chance, pull and whim, regardless of the personal character or intentions of their members. Non-objective law is a virulently destructive social phenomenon. But this is worse than non-objective law: it is non-objective personal power without any pretense at formal law. These boards represent the institutionalizing of rule by fear and favor.

"It is a grave error to suppose that a dictatorship rules a nation by means of strict, rigid laws which are obeyed and enforced with rigorous, military precision. Such a rule would be evil, but almost bearable; men could endure the harshest edicts, provided these edicts were known, specific and stable; it is not the known that breaks men's spirits, but the unpredictable. A dictatorship has to be capricious; it has to rule by means of the unexpected, the incomprehensible, the wantonly irrational; it has to deal not in death, but in sudden death; a state of chronic uncertainty is what men are psychologically unable to bear." (From my article "Antitrust: The Rule of Unreason," The Objectivist Newsletter, February 1962.)

No, I do not believe that Mr. Nixon wants to be a dictator. But if

you throw a noose around a man's (or a nation's) throat and keep tightening it, it makes no difference whether you want to be a murderer or not.

In view of the fact that Mr. Nixon's whole structure, along with all of its underlying policies, maneuvering, manipulations, deceptions and anti-ideology, rests on a single hope: a rise in the country's productivity, it is grimly ironic that this structure cuts off and paralyzes the men it needs most: the men who raise a country's productivity. There is no pressure group to represent the men of intelligence, the nonconformists, the originators, the innovators - and yet it is against their brains that any freezing program is directed.

Nothing can raise a country's productivity except technology, and technology is the final product of a complex of sciences (including philosophy), each of them kept alive and moving by the achievements of a few independent minds. Such minds do not function on the expediency of the moment. The better the mind, the longer the range. Scientists, inventors, discoverers work and plan in terms of decades. To a pragmatist or a politician, ten years is the unknowable; to a great mind pursuing a great achievement, it is just one step. The steadfast confidence required for such work is based on certainty, not the certainty of guaranteed success, but the certainty of one's freedom to take calculated - and calculable - risks. Can you see such a mind venturing out on such a road, with the knowledge that a single sentence broadcast over the air without warning can stop him dead at any moment? Can you see him pleading with a board for permission to continue? Can you see him entering the game of pressure politics and wriggling his way through a maze of boards with built-in uncertainty in their functions? If not, then you know what this country will lose and what incalculable loss it has sustained already - in the form of a traumatic shock of helpless discouragement sustained by a young mind on hearing Mr. Nixon's freezing bombshell, a young mind that could have become a skyrocket lighting the world, but will never be heard from or seen. And we will never know how many hopes, half-formed plans, and half-grasped visions died in lesser men that night, along with the best within them.

Oh yes, there are men who will adjust. But they are not the kind that raise a country's productivity. For a preview, take a look at the public characters (their private characters are often different) of two groups of men who live under non-objective law: businessmen under the rule of antitrust legislation, and broadcasters under the rule of the FCC. If you observe their timidity, their uncertainty, their gray conformity, their stale superficiality, their lack of life, of fire, of color, of self-assertive ambition, you can see the image of what will become our national character under Mr. Nixon's new economic policy.

Favors are not a substitute for rights, and fear is not an incentive to ambition. Fear makes people shrink in moral and mental stature, and draw away from action. It is precisely this kind of shrinking - he calls it "self-sacrifice" - that Mr. Nixon expects. Even though distorted by a mixed economy, the essential demands of legitimate economic groups are not arbitrary: a businessman cannot run his business at a loss, a worker cannot continue working if he cannot meet his expenses. What is Mr. Nixon demanding of them? Renunciation - the shrinking of their ambi-

tion to grow and of their standard of living. Fear and controls can accomplish this. But ask yourself what this will do to the growth of productivity.

Mr. Nixon's immediate intention is clear and, probably, deliberate: he has set up a choice of scapegoats. First, the blame for the coming disasters will be placed on one board or another, or on their various members, or on the groups they represent. Then, the blame will be placed on the victims, i.e., the people, and on freedom. Observe Mr. Nixon's insistent pleas for the people's "voluntary" cooperation. "But Government with all of its powers does not hold the key to the success of a people. That key, my fellow Americans, is in your hands....whether we hold fast to the strength that makes peace and freedom possible in this world or lose our grip - all that depends on you." (Speech of August 15.)

The next phase is to declare that people's greed, selfishness and lack of faith have defeated the bold experiment - that "voluntarism" and freedom were given a chance, but failed - and, therefore, that stronger measures are necessary. The rest is history - the kind of bloodily, monotonously repeated history that men are still refusing to learn from.

No one can predict how long this process will take, or what twists, delays, disguises and momentary illusions of safety will prolong it, or how much the resilient vitality and persevering energy of the American people will be able to stand. It may be a year, it may be longer, but such is the end of the trail we are following (if we continue to follow it).

The symptoms to expect are: a general spread of physical and spiritual shoddiness, in people, in professional services, in industrial products - shortages - black markets - corruption - favor-peddling - "temporary" controls and more "temporary" controls - and, possibly, a runaway inflation.

Space does not permit me a fuller discussion of what such a system does to men's psychology. But I suggest that you read - or reread - the last sequence of Chapter VII, Part II of Atlas Shrugged. It will show you the effects - and the causes - of a national freeze better than I can do it here. Privately, I call that passage "the damnation sequence." The chapter is called "The Moratorium on Brains."

A question I am constantly asked today is whether I still hold any hope for this country's future. The answer is: yes - but I will discuss my reasons in my next Letter.

Ayn Rand

THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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DON'T LET IT GO

In order to form a hypothesis about the future of an individual, one must consider three elements: his present course of action, his conscious convictions, and his sense of life. The same elements must be considered in forming a hypothesis about the future of a nation.

A sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It represents an individual's unidentified philosophy (which can be identified - and corrected, if necessary); it affects his choice of values and his emotional responses, influences his actions, and, frequently, clashes with his conscious convictions. (For a detailed discussion, see "Philosophy and Sense of Life" in my book The Romantic Manifesto.)

A nation, like an individual, has a sense of life, which is expressed not in its formal culture, but in its "life style" - in the kinds of actions and attitudes which people take for granted and believe to be self-evident, but which are produced by complex evaluations involving a fundamental view of man's nature.

A "nation" is not a mystic or supernatural entity: it is a large number of individuals who live in the same geographical locality under the same political system. A nation's culture is the sum of the intellectual achievements of individual men, which their fellow-citizens have accepted in whole or in part, and which have influenced the nation's way of life. Since a culture is a complex battleground of different ideas and influences, to speak of a "culture" is to speak only of the dominant ideas, always allowing for the existence of dissenters and exceptions.

(The dominance of certain ideas is not necessarily determined by the number of their adherents: it may be determined by majority acceptance, or by the greater activity and persistence of a given faction, or by default, i.e., the failure of the opposition, or - when a country is free - by a combination of persistence and truth. In any case, ideas and the resultant culture are the product and active concern of a minority. Who constitutes this minority? Who ever chooses to be concerned.)

Similarly, the concept of a nation's sense of life does not mean that every member of a given nation shares it, but only that a dominant majority shares its essentials in various degrees. In this matter, however, the dominance is numerical: while most men may be indifferent to cultural-ideological trends, no man can escape the process of subconscious integration which forms his sense of life.

A nation's sense of life is formed by every individual child's early impressions of the world around him: of the ideas he is taught (which he may or may not accept) and of the way of acting he observes and evaluates (which he may evaluate correctly or not). And although there are exceptions at both ends of the psychological spectrum - men whose sense of life is better (truer philosophically) or worse than that of their fellow-citizens - the majority develop the essentials of the same subconscious philosophy. This is the source of what we observe as "national characteristics."

A nation's political trends are the equivalent of a man's course of action and are determined by its culture. A nation's culture is the equivalent of a man's conscious convictions. Just as an individual's sense of life can clash with his conscious convictions, hampering or defeating his actions, so a nation's sense of life can clash with its culture, hampering or defeating its political course. Just as an individual's sense of life can be better or worse than his conscious convictions, so can a nation's. And just as an individual who has never translated his sense of life into conscious convictions is in terrible danger - no matter how good his subconscious values - so is a nation.

This is the position of America today.

If America is to be saved from destruction - specifically, from dictatorship - she will be saved by her sense of life.

As to the two other elements that determine a nation's future, one (our political trend) is speeding straight to disaster, the other (culture) is virtually nonexistent. The political trend is pure statism and is moving toward a totalitarian dictatorship at a speed which, in any other country, would have reached that goal long ago. The culture is worse than nonexistent: it is operating below zero, i.e., performing the opposite of its function. A culture provides a nation's intellectual leadership, its ideas, its education, its moral code. Today, the concerted effort of our cultural "Establishment" is directed at the obliteration of man's rational faculty. Hysterical voices are proclaiming the impotence of reason, extolling the "superior power" of irrationality, fostering the rule of incoherent emotions, attacking science, glorifying the stupor of drugged hippies, delivering apologies for the use of brute force, urging mankind's return to a life of rolling in primeval muck, with grunts and groans as means of communication, physical sensations as means of inspiration, and a club as means of argumentation.

This country, with its magnificent scientific and technological power, is left in the vacuum of a pre-intellectual era, like the wandering hordes of the Dark Ages - or in the position of an adolescent before he has fully learned to conceptualize. But an adolescent has his sense of life to guide his choices. So has this country.

What is the specifically American sense of life?

A sense of life is so complex an integration that the best way to identify it is by means of concrete examples and by contrast with the manifestations of a different sense of life.

The emotional keynote of most Europeans is the feeling that man belongs to the State, as a property to be used and disposed of, in compliance with his natural, metaphysically determined fate. A typical European may disapprove of a

given State and may rebel, seeking to establish what he regards as a better one, like a slave who might seek a better master to serve - but the idea that he is the sovereign and the government is his servant, has no emotional reality in his consciousness. He regards service to the State as an ultimate moral sanction, as an honor, and if you told him that his life is an end in itself, he would feel insulted or rejected or lost. Generations brought up on statist philosophy and acting accordingly, have implanted this in his mind from the earliest, formative years of his childhood.

A typical American can never fully grasp that kind of feeling. An American is an independent entity. The popular expression of protest against "being pushed around," is emotionally unintelligible to Europeans, who believe that to be pushed around is their natural condition. Emotionally, an American has no concept of service (or of servitude) to anyone. Even if he enlists in the Army and hears it called "service to his country," his feeling is that of a generous aristocrat who chose to do a dangerous task. A European soldier feels that he is doing his duty.

"Isn't my money as good as the next fellow's?" used to be a popular American expression. It would not be popular in Europe: a fortune, to be good, must be old and derived by special favor from the State; to a European, money earned by personal effort is vulgar, crude or somehow disreputable.

Americans admire achievement; they know what it takes. Europeans regard achievement with cynical suspicion and envy. Envy is not a widespread emotion in America (not yet); it is an overwhelmingly dominant emotion in Europe.

When Americans feel respect for their public figures, it is the respect of equals; they feel that a government official is a human being, just as they are, who has chosen this particular line of work and has earned a certain distinction. They call celebrities by their first names, they refer to Presidents by their initials (like "F.D.R." or "J.F.K."), not as insolence or egalitarian pretentiousness, but in token of affection. The custom of addressing a person as "Herr Doktor Doktor Schmidt" would be impossible in America. In England, the freest country of Europe, the achievement of a scientist, a businessman or a movie star is not regarded as fully real until he has been clunked on the head with the State's sword and declared to be a knight.

There are practical consequences of these two different attitudes.

An American economist told me the following story. He was sent to England by an American industrial concern, to investigate its European branch: in spite of the latest equipment and techniques, the productivity of the branch in England kept lagging far behind that of the parent-factory in the U.S. He found the cause: a rigidly circumscribed mentality, a kind of psychological caste system, on all the echelons of British labor and management. As he explained it: in America, if a machine breaks down, a worker volunteers to fix it, and usually does; in England, work stops and people wait for the appropriate department to summon the appropriate engineer. It is not a matter of laziness, but of a profoundly ingrained feeling that one must keep one's place, do one's prescribed duty, and never venture beyond it. It does not occur to the British worker that he is free to assume responsibility for anything beyond the limits of his particular job. Initiative is an "instinctive" (i.e., automatized) American characteristic; in an American consciousness, it occupies the place which, in a European one, is occupied by obedience.

As to the differences in the social atmosphere, here is an example. An elderly European woman, a research biochemist from Switzerland, on a visit to New York, told me that she wanted to buy some things at the five-and-ten. Since she could barely speak English, I offered to go with her; she hesitated, looking astonished and disturbed, then asked: "But wouldn't that embarrass you?" I couldn't understand what she meant: "Embarrass - how?" "Well," she explained, "you are a famous person, and what if somebody sees you in the five-and-ten?" I laughed. She explained to me that in Switzerland, by unwritten law, there are different stores for different classes of people, and that she, as a professional, has to shop in certain stores, even though her salary is modest, that better goods at lower prices are available in the workingmen's stores, but she would lose social status if she were seen shopping there. Can you conceive of living in an atmosphere of that kind? (We did go to the five-and-ten.)

A European, on any social level, lives emotionally in a world made by others (he never knows clearly by whom), and seeks or accepts his place in it. The American attitude is best expressed by a line from a poem: "The world began when I was born and the world is mine to win." ("The Westerner" by Badger Clark.)

Years ago, at a party in Hollywood, I met Eve Curie, a distinguished Frenchwoman, the daughter of Marie Curie. Eve Curie was a best-selling author of non-fiction books and, politically, a liberal; at the time, she was on a lecture tour of the United States. She stressed her astonishment at American audiences. "They are so happy," she kept repeating, "so happy..." She was saying it without disapproval and without admiration, with only the faintest touch of amusement; but her astonishment was genuine. "People are not like that in Europe...Everybody is happy in America - except the intellectuals. Oh, the intellectuals are unhappy everywhere."

This incident has remained in my mind because she had named, unwittingly, the nature of the breach between the American people and the intellectuals. The culture of a worn, crumbling Europe - with its mysticism, its lethargic resignation, its cult of suffering, its notion that misery and impotence are man's fate on earth, and that unhappiness is the hallmark of a sensitive spirit - of what use could it be to a country like America?

It was a European who discovered America, but it was Americans who were the first nation to discover this earth and man's proper place on it, and man's potential for happiness, and the world which is man's to win. What they failed to discover is the words to name their achievement, the concepts to identify it, the principles to guide it, i.e., the appropriate philosophy and its consequence: an American culture.

(To be continued.)

Ayn Rand

THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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DON'T LET IT GO

Part II

America has never had an original culture, i.e., a body of ideas derived from her philosophical (Aristotelian) base and expressing her profound difference from all other countries in history.

American intellectuals were Europe's passive dependents and poor relatives almost from the beginning. They lived on Europe's drying crumbs and discarded fashions, including even such hand-me-downs as Freud and Wittgenstein. America's sole contribution to philosophy - Pragmatism - was a bad recycling of Kantian-Hegelian premises.

America's best minds went into science, technology, industry - and reached incomparable heights of achievement. Why did they neglect the field of ideas? Because it represented Augean stables of a kind no joyously active man would care to enter. America's childhood coincided with the rise of Kant's influence in European philosophy and the consequent disintegration of European culture. America was in the position of an eager, precocious child left in the care of a scruffy, senile, decadent guardian. The child had good reason to play hooky.

An adolescent can ride on his sense of life for a while. But by the time he grows up, he must translate it into conceptual knowledge and conscious convictions, or he will be in deep trouble. A sense of life is not a substitute for explicit knowledge. Values which one cannot identify, but merely senses implicitly, are not in one's control. One cannot tell what they depend on or require, what course of action is needed to gain and/or keep them. One can lose or betray them without knowing it. For close to a century, this has been America's tragic predicament. Today, the American people is like a sleepwalking giant torn by profound conflicts. (When I speak of "the American people," in this context, I mean every group, including scientists and businessmen - except the intellectuals, i.e., those whose professions deal with the humanities. The intellectuals are a country's guardians.)

Americans are the most reality-oriented people on earth. Their outstanding characteristic is the childhood form of reasoning: common sense. It is their only protection. But common sense is not enough where theoretical knowledge is required: it can make simple, concrete-bound connections - it cannot integrate complex issues, or deal with wide abstractions, or forecast the future.

For example, consider the statist trend in this country. The doctrine of

collectivism has never been submitted explicitly to the American voters; if it had been, it would have sustained a landslide defeat (as the various socialist parties have demonstrated). But the Welfare State was put over on Americans piecemeal, by degrees, under cover of some undefined "Americanism" - culminating in the absurdity of a President's declaration that America owes its greatness to "the willingness for self-sacrifice." People sense that something has gone wrong; they cannot grasp what or when. This is the penalty they pay for remaining a silent (and deaf) majority.

Americans are anti-intellectual (with good grounds, in view of current specimens), yet they have a profound respect for knowledge and education (which is being shaken now). They are self-confident, trusting, generous, enormously benevolent and innocent. "...that celebrated American 'innocence' [is] a quality which in philosophical terms is simply an ignorance of how questionable a being man really is and which strikes the European as alien..." declares an existentialist (William Barrett, Irrational Man). The word "questionable" is a euphemism for miserable, guilty, impotent, groveling, evil - which is the European view of man. Europeans do believe in Original Sin, i.e., in man's innate depravity; Americans do not. Americans see man as a value - as clean, free, creative, rational. But the American view of man has not been expressed or upheld in philosophical terms (not since the time of our first Founding Father, Aristotle; see his description of the "magnanimous man").

Barrett continues: "Sartre recounts a conversation he had with an American while visiting in this country. The American insisted that all international problems could be solved if men would just get together and be rational; Sartre disagreed and after a while discussion between them became impossible. 'I believe in the existence of evil,' says Sartre, 'and he does not.'" This, again, is a euphemism: it is not merely the existence but the power of evil that Europeans believe in. Americans do not believe in the power of evil and do not understand its nature. The first part of their attitude is (philosophically) true, but the second makes them vulnerable. On the day when Americans grasp the cause of evil's impotence - its mindless, fear-ridden, envy-eaten smallness - they will be free of all the man-hating manipulators of history, foreign and domestic.

So far, America's protection has been a factor best expressed by a saying attributed to con men: "You can't cheat an honest man." The innocence and common sense of the American people have wrecked the plans, the devious notions, the tricky strategies, the ideological traps borrowed by the intellectuals from the European statisticians, who devised them to fool and rule Europe's impotent masses. There have never been any "masses" in America: the poorest American is an individual and, subconsciously, an individualist. Marxism, which has conquered our universities, is a dismal failure as far as the people are concerned: Americans cannot be sold on any sort of class war; American workers do not see themselves as a "proletariat," but are among the proudest of property owners. It is professors and businessmen who advocate cooperation with Soviet Russia - American labor unions do not.

The enormous propaganda effort to make Americans fear fascism but not communism, has failed: Americans hate them both. The terrible hoax of the United Nations has failed. Americans were never enthusiastic about that institution, but they gave it the benefit of the doubt for too long. The current polls, however, indicate that the majority have turned against the U.N. (better late than never).

The latest assault on human life - the ecology crusade - will probably end in defeat for its ideological leadership: Americans will enthusiastically clean their streets, their rivers, their backyards, but when it comes to giving up progress, technology, the automobile, and their standard of living, Americans will prove that the man-haters "ain't seen nothing yet."

The sense-of-life emotion which, in Europe, makes people uncertain, malleable and easy to rule, is unknown in America: fundamental guilt. No one, so far, has been able to infect America with that contemptible feeling (and I doubt that anyone ever will). Americans cannot begin to grasp the kind of corruption implied and demanded by that feeling.

But an honest man can cheat himself. His trusting innocence can lead him to swallow sugar-coated poisons - the deadliest of which is altruism. Americans accept it - not for what it is, not as a vicious doctrine of self-immolation - but in the spirit of a strong, confident man's overgenerous desire to relieve the suffering of others, whose character he does not understand. When such a man awakens to the betrayal of his trust - to the fact that his generosity has brought him within reach of a permanent harness which is about to be slipped on him by his sundry beneficiaries - the consequences are unpredictable.

There are two ways of destroying a country: dictatorship or chaos, i.e., immediate rigor mortis or the longer agony of the collapse of all civilized institutions and the breakup of a nation into roving armed gangs fighting and looting one another, until some one Attila conquers the rest. This means: chaos as a prelude to tyranny - as was the case in Western Europe in the Dark Ages, or in the three hundred years preceding the Romanoff dynasty in Russia, or under the war lords regime in China.

A European is disarmed in the face of a dictatorship: he may hate it, but he feels that he is wrong and, metaphysically, the State is right. An American would rebel to the bottom of his soul. But this is all that his sense of life can do for him: it cannot solve his problems.

Only one thing is certain: a dictatorship cannot take hold in America today. This country, as yet, cannot be ruled - but it can explode. It can blow up into the helpless rage and blind violence of a civil war. It cannot be cowed into submission, passivity, malevolence, resignation. It cannot be "pushed around." Defiance, not obedience, is the American's answer to overbearing authority. The nation that ran an underground railroad to help human beings escape from slavery, or began drinking on principle in the face of Prohibition, will not say "Yes, sir," to the enforcers of ration coupons and cereal prices. Not yet.

If America drags on in her present state for a few more generations (which is unlikely), dictatorship will become possible. A sense of life is not a permanent endowment. The characteristically American one is being eroded daily all around us. Large numbers of Americans have lost it (or have never developed it) and are collapsing to the psychological level of Europe's worst rabble.

This is prevalent among the two groups that are the main supporters of the statist trend: the very rich and the very poor - the first, because they want to rule; the second, because they want to be ruled. (The leaders of the trend are the intellectuals, who want to do both.) But this country has never had an unearned, hereditary "elite." America is still the country of self-made men, which

means: the country of the middle class - the most productive and exploited group in any modern society.

The academia-jet set coalition is attempting to tame the American character by the deliberate breeding of helplessness and resignation - in those incubators of lethargy known as "Progressive" schools, which are dedicated to the task of crippling a child's mind by arresting his cognitive development. (See "The Comprachicos" in my book The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution.) It appears, however, that the "progressive" rich will be the first victims of their own social theories: it is the children of the well-to-do who emerge from expensive nursery schools and colleges as hippies, and destroy the remnants of their paralyzed brains by means of drugs.

The middle class has created an antidote which is perhaps the most hopeful movement of recent years: the spontaneous, unorganized, grass-roots revival of the Montessori system of education - a system aimed at the development of a child's cognitive, i.e., rational, faculty. But that is a long-range prospect.

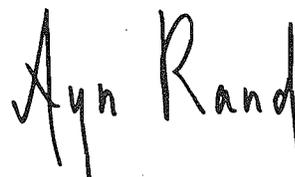
At present, even so dismal a figure as President Nixon is a hopeful sign - precisely because he is so dismal. If any other country were in as desperately precarious a state of confusion as ours, a dozen flamboyant Führers would have sprung up overnight to take it over. It is to America's credit that no such Führer has appeared, and if any did, it is doubtful that he would have a chance.

Can this country achieve a peaceful rebirth in the foreseeable future? By all precedents, it is not likely. But America is an unprecedented phenomenon. In the past, American perseverance became, on occasion, too long-bearing a patience. But when Americans turned, they turned. What may happen to the Welfare State is what happened to the Prohibition Amendment.

Is there enough of the American sense of life left in people - under the constant pressure of the cultural-political efforts to obliterate it? It is impossible to tell. But those of us who hold it, must fight for it. We have no alternative: we cannot surrender this country to a zero - to men whose battle cry is mindlessness.

We cannot fight against collectivism, unless we fight against its moral base: altruism. We cannot fight against altruism, unless we fight against its epistemological base: irrationalism. We cannot fight against anything, unless we fight for something - and what we must fight for is the supremacy of reason, and a view of man as a rational being.

These are philosophical issues. The philosophy we need is a conceptual equivalent of America's sense of life. To propagate it, would require the hardest intellectual battle. But isn't that a magnificent goal to fight for?



THE Ayn Rand LETTER

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December 20, 1971

THE DISFRANCHISEMENT OF THE RIGHT

The campaign to defeat the nomination of William H. Rehnquist to the Supreme Court, is a microcosm of our culture: it reveals the tactics of modern intellectuals, their moral stature - and what permits them to get away with it.

The campaign is also an object lesson for those who do not see the connection of philosophy to practical politics. It demonstrates the function of fundamental principles by displaying the consequences of their obliteration.

I am not acquainted with Mr. Rehnquist, and my knowledge of his ideas is confined to the current news stories. I agree with some, though not all, of his statements. In discussing public figures, one can speak only on the basis of the presently available evidence. As of this writing, the evidence indicates that Mr. Rehnquist is a man of unusual professional competence, and that his political views are "rightist."

(Since, today, there are no clear definitions of political terms, I use the word "rightist" to denote the views of those who are predominantly in favor of individual freedom and capitalism - and the word "leftist" to denote the views of those who are predominantly in favor of government controls and socialism. As to the middle or "center," I take it to mean "zero," i.e., no dominant position, i.e., a pendulum swinging from side to side, moment by moment.)

For about half a century, the intellectuals, most of whom are leftist, have been struggling to achieve a spatial situation which is geometrically impossible: a political field consisting of a middle and a left-of-middle, with no right-of-middle. They came close to succeeding. Their success was made possible by the non-philosophical attitude of most rightists, who surrendered the intellect to the leftists, accepted their basic premises, and mouthed empty slogans in answer to deadly political principles - or: who accepted a wholesaler's warehouse of tainted meat, then haggled over the price and cut of the chops at the corner grocery store.

This permitted the intellectuals to play the game of "window dressing," i.e., to preach political tolerance or impartiality and to practice it, on suitable occasions, by featuring the weakest, most befuddled champion of capitalism as a representative of the right. (Which led people to the conclusion: "If this is the best that can be said for the right, then the leftist position must be true.")

Professional competence and personal integrity have been generally regarded as the criteria for judging a nominee to the Supreme Court. These are not ideal criteria: they are open to various interpretations and have not been observed very

strictly in the past. The intellectuals of the left found ways to stretch them for or against a nominee, depending on his political views, yet managed to preserve a semblance of political impartiality. Now, however, they have come up against a phenomenon they did not expect to exist: a rightist whose competence and integrity are unimpeachable, and who is an intellectual (in the legitimate sense of the word).

The best exposition of the reasons behind the anti-Rehnquist campaign, was given by Tom Wicker in The New York Times (November 11, 1971): "The Rehnquist matter is not even like that of Lewis Powell, whom Mr. Nixon has also named to the Court. Mr. Powell is a pillar of the Southern establishment...he is 64 years old and his tenure on the Court will be limited by that; he is not expected by most observers to become a powerful leader within the Court. Mr. Rehnquist is a horse of a very different color. At 47, he can look forward to a long and active tenure on the bench. Moreover, his record is that of a hard-working and vigorous champion of conservative political causes...Persons in and out of the Administration who know his work credit him with superior intellect and skill in the law. Thus Mr. Rehnquist on the Court is altogether likely to become a driving force for the principles he espouses. There are those who believe that as the years go along he will be a more formidable leader than Chief Justice Burger in the conservative wing of the Court..."

This means that the vaunted tolerance, the respect for differences of opinion, the fairness toward nonconformity, the protection of the right to dissent - so loudly advocated by the left - are to be extended only to ineffectual adversaries, but not to those who are a serious threat. It amounts to the declaration: "We'll play with you, boys, so long as you don't have a chance to win."

I seldom agree with Mr. Wicker, but he had the honesty to say that to reject Mr. Rehnquist's nomination solely on the basis of his political views "is dangerous business. It presumes some kind of rightful political orthodoxy; it would tend to politicize the courts according to the temporary political coloration of Congress; it could punish some individuals for their ideas and frighten others out of having any." (Which, in today's context, is unanswerably true.)

But Mr. Wicker's fellow-liberals stuck to their usual tactics and reverted to their catch phrases of the 1960s. The champions of dissent began shouting that Mr. Rehnquist is "out of the mainstream of American thought." (If being in a "mainstream of thought" is not conformity, what is?) They went further back than that: the smear campaign they staged belongs to the 1930s - only it is cruder and more shameful than the efforts of the past.

Under the guise of examining Mr. Rehnquist's philosophy, the liberals on the Senate Judiciary Committee questioned him about his views on such subjects as: (a) school busing, (b) the rights of criminals, and (c) the government's electronic surveillance of men suspected of criminal or subversive activities. These, I submit, are not philosophical questions: these are concrete applications of philosophical principles. To evaluate Mr. Rehnquist's philosophy, they should have asked him to state his views on: (a) racism, (b) individual rights, (c) the proper functions of government - which would have established the meaning of the concretes they were discussing.

Instead, they proceeded to denounce, not Mr. Rehnquist's views, but their own interpretations of his views - with the dogmatic, authoritarian irrationality of religious Inquisitors on a heresy hunt, or of demagogues. Anyone who disapproves of busing, they declared, is an enemy of minorities; anyone who holds that the po-

lice must be enabled to protect the rights of law-abiding citizens, is hostile to the concept of rights; anyone who holds that the proper function of the government is to protect the country from the initiators of force, foreign or domestic, is an enemy of freedom and an advocate of statism. (Observe the philosophical switch: it is the "rights" of criminals that they were discussing as the paradigm case of the rights of man.)

"Mr. Rehnquist's record reveals a dangerous hostility to the great principles of individual freedom under the Bill of Rights and equal justice for all people," declared the minority report of four liberals on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The technique of the Big Lie is a well-known phenomenon. But not enough attention has been paid to a similar technique, which may be called the "Big Projection": it consists in ascribing to your adversary the evil of which you are guilty. Soviet Russia accusing the United States of "imperialism," is an example of such Projection. So is the spectacle of four leftists (i.e., statist) accusing a rightist (i.e., an advocate of free enterprise) of "hostility to individual freedom."

To the credit of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which approved Rehnquist's nomination by a vote of 12 to 4, the majority report declared that the charges against him were "totally unfounded."

What was the evidence on which the liberals based their charges?

The main issue, apparently, was the allegation that he had once been a member of a group called "Arizonans for America." Mr. Rehnquist denied it. According to the Times (November 23): "Senator Birch Bayh, Democrat of Indiana, had specifically raised the membership question on the basis of information compiled by Mrs. Frank Brookes of Phoenix, who died earlier this year. Mrs. Brookes, who attended many meetings sponsored by right-wing groups and took notes, had listed Mr. Rehnquist, who lived here, as a member of Arizonans for America in 1958 and For America in 1960."

What do we know about Mrs. Brookes or her veracity? Here is the only evidence offered in the story: "Several women who helped Mrs. Brookes compile this record... say she worked with painstaking care to be accurate in listing names of persons who participated in the meetings or other activities of their organizations. Mrs. Guy A. Reem, former membership chairman for Arizonans for America, said that actually the group had had no membership list as such. But she said that it had had a mailing list, and that Mr. Rehnquist had been on this."

Have you ever tried to get off a mailing list? Until recently, it was practically impossible. Mailing lists of every conceivable kind are compiled and sold, and there is no way of knowing why or how your name came to be included. (This practice is harmless, however, since you are free to ignore the mailings.) But to regard the presence of a man's name on a mailing list as an indication, or a proof, of the nature of his political views is so grotesquely absurd that no one could discuss it seriously - if it were not for the fact that this sort of argument is offered to the U.S. Senate.

A responsible person cares about the objectivity of his reputation. If he is going to be judged, not by facts, but by the nature of the circulars he receives in the mail - if his financial status is judged by investment solicitations, his future plans by travel folders, his health by insurance brochures, and his ideas by the magazines he did not subscribe to - what becomes of his reputation?

But - the Times story goes on - two members of the Arizona group "recalled hearing Mr. Rehnquist speak to the group in a panel discussion on the income tax in 1958." This is more vicious an attempt than the mailing list bit. This is an insidious kind of intimidation: it equates a speaker's views with those of the discussion's sponsors. A man of integrity is conscientiously precise about the nature of his views on any subject. If his views are going to be judged, not by his own statements, but by the views of those who invite him to speak - if, in today's orgy of contradictions, when most people do not know their own political ideas from moment to moment, a speaker is to be held responsible for the present and future ideas of any organization he addresses - then his only alternative is to accept no speaking engagements. If so, what happens to our freedom of speech?

Such tactics would be outrageous regardless of the nature of the groups involved, even if the groups were actually disreputable. But consider the nature of the two Arizona groups mentioned. The Times describes them as follows: "The organizations opposed the United Nations, foreign aid, foreign trade, international treaties, recognition of Communist countries, Federal aid to education and the Federal income tax." Are these crimes? Are these ideas so evil that, at the faintest suspicion of any contact with them, a man becomes a pariah, a second-class citizen barred from high public office?

It is obvious that those organizations were merely primitive patriotic groups. Most of their ideas as listed above are valid. Personally, I have little sympathy with such groups because they do not know how to uphold their ideas intellectually, because they rush unarmed and unprepared into a deadly battle and do more harm than good to the rightist cause. But this is a different matter. What is relevant here is only the fact that the present smear campaign is attempting once more to snatch an official sanction - the sanction of the U.S. Senate - for the notion that patriotism (primitive or otherwise) is a forbidden, subversive doctrine.

Now observe the full display of a double standard.

The Communist Party openly advocates the overthrow of the government by force and violence, but an individual member, who knew it when he joined the party, is not presumed to share this view, unless it is proved that he personally advocated it. Yet a rightist is presumed to share the views of an organization on the basis of a mailing list or a panel discussion.

Leftists who associate with groups that preach and engage in riots, looting, bombing, killing, suffer no social penalty for such association. Yet a rightist is threatened with public opprobrium for a suspicion of an unproved association with a group that opposes the income tax and the U.N.

Women's Lib joins a common front with lesbians and prostitutes, but its individual members are treated as respectable women. Yet a rightist is regarded as disreputable because the leader of an organization he may have addressed, later joined the John Birch Society.

The worst issue of all - from the standpoint of the leftists' own premises - is Mrs. Brookes' lists.

In the 1940s and '50s, some rightist groups compiled lists of persons who were members of organizations classified by the U.S. Attorney General as subversive. These lists allegedly led to the blacklisting of some persons in the movie and radio industries. The screaming fury of the leftists' protests was louder than

on any other issue. It was not the inaccuracy of the lists that they objected to - as far as is known, the lists were accurate - but the practice of private political surveillance. They screamed that the rightist groups were "vigilantes," that the practice violated the civil rights of the victims, that it bred suspicion, hatred, fear. ("Don't be a self-appointed spy on your neighbors," was the line, "leave surveillance to the government.") Some of the alleged victims filed lawsuits against the compilers of the lists, and won heavy financial damages.

If we accept the leftists' premise, then by what right did Mrs. Brookes compile her lists? What is the social meaning and moral nature of her activity - particularly in view of the fact that her sources were not actual membership records? What is the moral status of those who introduce such material into the deliberations of the U.S. Senate - and attempt, on such basis, to deny to a man, not a movie job, but a seat on the Supreme Court?

And more: today, the leftists are objecting to government surveillance of suspected criminals and subversives, on the grounds that some methods, such as wire-tapping, violate a suspect's civil rights - and they are objecting to all forms of government surveillance of political organizations. A news story in the Times (November 17) states: "The Supreme Court has agreed to consider if citizens can go to court to block Army intelligence agents from conducting surveillance of civilian political activities." A lower court had ruled that "individuals and groups that claim to have been spied upon by Army agents are entitled to a trial to determine if there has been a 'chilling effect' upon free expression." The purpose of the suit is: "to stop the Army from spying upon civilian political matters and to force the Army to destroy records of its past surveillance which were said to have been stored in computers."

If so, why are there no voices demanding that Mrs. Brookes' records be destroyed?

(Parenthetically, to untangle the principles involved: since private citizens have political freedom, which includes the right of free expression, free association, and any form of non-violent (i.e., non-criminal) political activity, they have the right to observe the political activities of others. Both Mrs. Brookes and the rightist groups of the '40s-'50s had the right to compile political lists - provided they could prove the truth of their allegations. As to governmental surveillance, it is the duty of the government to protect the country from criminals and enemy agents, i.e., subversives, which includes the necessity of spying. Such surveillance, if conducted under objectively defined rules of evidence, does not endanger a citizen's rights, because the government cannot prosecute or punish him for his political ideas or activities. But it can and should prosecute him if he is proved to be the agent of a foreign government - which is a military, not an ideological, matter. A foreign government has no civil rights inside a country, only legally granted privileges; subversion is not one of them.)

As to the issue of a "chilling effect upon free expression," who is kidding whom? It is an established fact that Soviet Russia is conducting an ideological war against the free or semi-free world, and that Russian agents infiltrate the political organizations of other countries. In such circumstances, how can a private citizen complain about being "chilled" by the surveillance of his own country's government? If he is innocent, it should be much more "chilling" to him that he might be manipulated by foreign agents, spies and saboteurs, with his government offering him no protection. If he wants to take that chance, he has to expect to be "chilled" - because the rest of us feel a stronger "chill" at the prospect of

Russian agents fishing around for nuclear secrets.

But if we must consider such a problem as the "chilling effect upon free expression," then what about the terrorization under which the rightists in this country have had to live for decades? What about the torrents of smears, misrepresentations, defamation, abuse poured by the intellectuals on any defender of capitalism? There are many people who are afraid to speak out against today's "mainstream" because they know that their views will be misrepresented. There are college students who are afraid to express disagreement with leftist professors, because they know that their grades will suffer. No one has looked into the systematic intimidation of such few rightist professors as still exist. And not many voices were raised in protest against the college goons' attacks on the persons and the works (the manuscripts) of rightist professors.

And if now the leftists are struggling to make it known, from a rostrum such as the U.S. Senate, that any sort of association with people who hold rightist views, will mark a man for life - that if he addresses such people, he will be penalized thirteen years later for their ideas - what will this do to the rightists' freedom of expression and association? Would you call it a "chill" - or a total freeze?

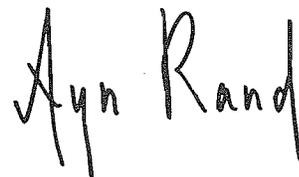
It is by means of such outrageous violations of his civil rights that the leftists are now attacking William H. Rehnquist for his "hostility" to civil rights.

Those intellectuals who favor a "peaceful" establishment of socialism mean, apparently, that it is not to be established by force, but by fraud - by the stealthy, gradual disfranchisement of its opponents.

Accepting the leftists' own terms for a moment, ask yourself: What are the rightists? If they are a majority, then the leftists are fascists opposing the will of the people. If the rightists are a minority, then they have a right to be represented on the Supreme Court (and everywhere else, including college faculties) - as much right as the Poor, the Black, the Young, or the Women. (And if such pressure-group divisions are evil, which they are, then question the premises of those who propagate them.)

At this writing, Mr. Rehnquist's nomination is about to be voted on by the Senate - and the present reports indicate that he will be confirmed. I hope so.

I am fully aware of the fact that man possesses volition, that his ideas may change, and that Mr. Rehnquist, like any other candidate for public office, may prove to be a disappointment to his supporters. But the issue is wider than Mr. Rehnquist: it is an issue of preserving the full rights of the rightists. It is a matter of principle.



THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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"WHAT CAN ONE DO?"

This question is frequently asked by people who are concerned about the state of today's world and want to correct it. More often than not, it is asked in a form that indicates the cause of their helplessness: "What can one person do?"

I was in the process of preparing this article when I received a letter from a reader who presents the problem (and the error) still more eloquently: "How can an individual propagate your philosophy on a scale large enough to effect the immense changes which must be made in every walk of American life in order to create the kind of ideal country which you picture?"

If this is the way the question is posed, the answer is: he can't. No one can change a country single-handed. So the first question to ask is: why do people approach the problem this way?

Suppose you were a doctor in the midst of an epidemic. You would not ask: "How can one doctor treat millions of patients and restore the whole country to perfect health?" You would know, whether you were alone or part of an organized medical campaign, that you have to treat as many people as you can reach, according to the best of your ability, and that nothing else is possible.

It is a remnant of mystic philosophy - specifically, of the mind-body split - that makes people approach intellectual issues in a manner they would not use to deal with physical problems. They would not seek to stop an epidemic overnight, or to build a skyscraper single-handed. Nor would they refrain from renovating their own crumbling house, on the grounds that they are unable to rebuild the entire city. But in the realm of man's consciousness, the realm of ideas, they still tend to regard knowledge as irrelevant, and they expect to perform instantaneous miracles, somehow - or they paralyze themselves by projecting an impossible goal.

(The reader whose letter I quoted was doing the right things, but felt that some wider scale of action was required. Many others merely ask the question, but do nothing.)

If you are seriously interested in fighting for a better world, begin by identifying the nature of the problem. The battle is primarily intellectual (philosophical), not political. Politics is the last consequence, the practical implementation, of the fundamental (metaphysical-epistemological-ethical) ideas that dominate a given nation's culture. You cannot fight or change the consequences without fighting and changing the cause; nor can you attempt any practical implementation without knowing what you want to implement.

In an intellectual battle, you do not need to convert everyone. History is made by minorities - or, more precisely, history is made by intellectual movements, which are created by minorities. Who belongs to these minorities? Anyone who is able and willing actively to concern himself with intellectual issues. Here, it is not quantity, but quality that counts (the quality - and consistency - of the ideas one is advocating).

An intellectual movement does not start with organized action. Whom would one organize? A philosophical battle is a battle for men's minds, not an attempt to enlist blind followers. Ideas can be propagated only by men who understand them. An organized movement has to be preceded by an educational campaign, which requires trained - self-trained - teachers (self-trained in the sense that a philosopher can offer you the material of knowledge, but it is your own mind that has to absorb it). Such training is the first requirement for being a doctor during an ideological epidemic - and the precondition of any attempt to "change the world."

"The immense changes which must be made in every walk of American life" cannot be made singly, piecemeal or "retail," so to speak; an army of crusaders would not be enough to do it. But the factor that underlies and determines every aspect of human life is philosophy; teach men the right philosophy - and their own minds will do the rest. Philosophy is the wholesaler in human affairs.

Man cannot exist without some form of philosophy, i.e., some comprehensive view of life. Most men are not intellectual innovators, but they are receptive to ideas, are able to judge them critically and to choose the right course, when and if it is offered. There are also a great many men who are indifferent to ideas and to anything beyond the concrete-bound range of the immediate moment; such men accept subconsciously whatever is offered by the culture of their time, and swing blindly with any chance current. They are merely social ballast - be they day laborers or company presidents - and, by their own choice, irrelevant to the fate of the world.

Today, most people are acutely aware of our cultural-ideological vacuum; they are anxious, confused, and groping for answers. Are you able to enlighten them?

Can you answer their questions? Can you offer them a consistent case? Do you know how to correct their errors? Are you immune from the fallout of the constant barrage aimed at the destruction of reason - and can you provide others with antimissile missiles? A political battle is merely a skirmish fought with muskets; a philosophical battle is a nuclear war.

If you want to influence a country's intellectual trend, the first step is to bring order to your own ideas and integrate them into a consistent case, to the best of your knowledge and ability. This does not mean memorizing and reciting slogans and principles, Objectivist or otherwise: knowledge necessarily includes the ability to apply abstract principles to concrete problems, to recognize the principles in specific issues, to demonstrate them, and to advocate a consistent course of action. This does not require omniscience or omnipotence; it is the subconscious expectation of automatic omniscience in oneself and in others that defeats many would-be crusaders (and serves as an excuse for doing nothing). What is required is honesty - intellectual honesty, which consists in knowing what one does know, constantly expanding one's knowledge, and never evading or failing to correct a contradiction. This means: the development of an active mind as a permanent attribute.

When or if your convictions are in your conscious, orderly control, you will be able to communicate them to others. This does not mean that you must make philosophical speeches when unnecessary and inappropriate. You need philosophy to back you up and give you a consistent case when you deal with or discuss specific issues.

If you like condensations (provided you bear in mind their full meaning), I will say: when you ask "What can one do?" - the answer is "SPEAK" (provided you know what you are saying).

A few suggestions: do not wait for a national audience. Speak on any scale open to you, large or small - to your friends, your associates, your professional organizations, or any legitimate public forum. You can never tell when your words will reach the right mind at the right time. You will see no immediate results - but it is of such activities that public opinion is made.

Do not pass up a chance to express your views on important issues. Write letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines, to TV and radio commentators and, above all, to your Congressmen (who depend on their constituents). If your letters are brief and rational (rather than incoherently emotional), they will have more influence than you suspect.

The opportunities to speak are all around you. I suggest that you make the following experiment: take an ideological "inventory" of one week, i.e., note how many times people utter the wrong political, social and moral notions as if these were self-evident truths, with your silent sanction. Then make it a habit to object to such remarks - no, not to make lengthy speeches, which are seldom appropriate, but merely to say: "I don't agree." (And be prepared to explain why, if the speaker wants to know.) This is one of the best ways to stop the spread of vicious bromides. (If the speaker is innocent, it will help him; if he is not, it will undercut his confidence the next time.) Most particularly, do not keep silent when your own ideas and values are being attacked.

Do not "proselytize" indiscriminately, i.e., do not force discussions or arguments on those who are not interested or not willing to argue. It is not your job to save everyone's soul. If you do the things which are in your power, you will not feel guilty about not doing - "somehow" - the things which are not.

Above all, do not join the wrong ideological groups or movements, in order to "do something." By "ideological" (in this context), I mean groups or movements proclaiming some vaguely generalized, undefined (and, usually, contradictory) political goals. (E.g., the Conservative Party, that subordinates reason to faith, and substitutes theocracy for capitalism; or the "libertarian" hippies, who subordinate reason to whims, and substitute anarchism for capitalism.) To join such groups means to reverse the philosophical hierarchy and to sell out fundamental principles for the sake of some superficial political action which is bound to fail. It means that you help the defeat of your ideas and the victory of your enemies. (For a discussion of the reasons, see "The Anatomy of Compromise" in my book Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal.)

The only groups one may properly join today are ad hoc committees, i.e., groups organized to achieve a single, specific, clearly defined goal, on which men of differing views can agree. In such cases, no one may attempt to ascribe his views to the entire membership, or to use the group to serve some hidden ideological purpose (and this has to be watched very, very vigilantly).

I am omitting the most important contribution to an intellectual movement - writing - because this discussion is addressed to men of every profession. Books, essays, articles are a movement's permanent fuel, but it is worse than futile to attempt to become a writer solely for the sake of a "cause." Writing, like any other work, is a profession and must be approached as such.

It is a mistake to think that an intellectual movement requires some special duty or self-sacrificial effort on your part. It requires something much more dif-

ficult: a profound conviction that ideas are important to you and to your own life. If you integrate that conviction to every aspect of your life, you will find many opportunities to enlighten others.

The reader whose letter I quoted, indicates the proper pattern of action: "As a teacher of astronomy, for several years, I have been actively engaged in demonstrating the power of reason and the absolutism of reality to my students...I have also made an effort to introduce your works to my associates, following their reading with discussion when possible; and have made it a point to insist on the use of reason in all of my personal dealings."

These are some of the right things to do, as often and as widely as possible.

But that reader's question implied a search for some shortcut in the form of an organized movement. No shortcut is possible.

It is too late for a movement of people who hold a conventional mixture of contradictory philosophical notions. It is too early for a movement of people dedicated to a philosophy of reason. But it is never too late or too early to propagate the right ideas - except under a dictatorship.

If a dictatorship ever comes to this country, it will be by the default of those who keep silent. We are still free enough to speak. Do we have time? No one can tell. But time is on our side - because we have an indestructible weapon and an invincible ally (if we learn how to use them): reason and reality.



OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

(Under this heading, we shall announce, from time to time, events or activities that may be of interest to the readers of this Letter.)

* Tapes of Dr. Leonard Peikoff's twelve-lecture course, Modern Philosophy: Kant to the Present, are still available, to groups of ten persons or more, on a rental basis. (This course, first offered in the Fall of 1970, concludes with two lectures on the philosophy of Objectivism.) There has been a change of address: Inquiries should be mailed to Susan Ludel, c/o TV Guide, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019.

* We have been asked to announce that full-color reproductions of Portrait of Ayn Rand by Ilona, and Diminishing Returns by Frank O'Connor, are available from Sures Art Enterprises, Ltd. The portrait appears (in black and white) on the jackets of many of Miss Rand's books. Diminishing Returns is a fantasy that features a puppet in a sunlit landscape, juggling bright Christmas tree balls. For illustrated brochures, write to SAE, Ltd., P.O. Box 207, Silver Spring, Md. 20907.

B.W.

THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER

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THE STIMULUS...

There are occasions when a worthless, insignificant book acquires significance as a scrap of litmus paper exposing a culture's intellectual state. Such a book is Beyond Freedom and Dignity by B.F. Skinner.

"Skinner is the most influential of living American psychologists..." says Time magazine (September 20, 1971). "Skinner has remained a highly influential figure among U.S. college students for well over a decade," says Newsweek (September 20, 1971). "Burrhus Frederic Skinner is the most influential psychologist alive today, and he is second only to Freud as the most important psychologist of all time. This, at least, is the feeling of 56 percent of the members of the American Psychological Association, who were polled on the question. And it should be reason enough to make Dr. Skinner's new book, Beyond Freedom and Dignity, one of the most important happenings in 20th century psychology," says Science News (August 7, 1971).

One cannot evaluate the cultural significance of such statements until one identifies the nature of their object.

The book itself is like Boris Karloff's embodiment of Frankenstein's monster: a corpse patched with nuts, bolts and screws from the junkyard of philosophy (Pragmatism, Social Darwinism, Positivism, Linguistic Analysis, with some nails by Hume, threads by Russell, and glue by the New York Post). The book's voice, like Karloff's, is an emission of inarticulate, moaning growls - directed at a special enemy: "Autonomous Man."

"Autonomous Man" is the term used by Mr. Skinner to denote man's consciousness in all those aspects which distinguish it from the sensory level of an animal's consciousness - specifically: reason, mind, values, concepts, thought, judgment, volition, purpose, memory, independence, self-esteem. These, he asserts, do not exist; they are an illusion, a myth, a "prescientific" superstition. His term may be taken to include everything we call "man's inner world," except that Mr. Skinner would never allow such an expression; whenever he has to refer to man's inner world, he says: "Inside your skin."

"Inside his skin," man is totally determined by his environment (and by his genetic endowment, which was determined by his ancestors' environment), Mr. Skinner asserts, and totally malleable. By controlling the environment, "behavioral technologists" could - and should - control men inside out. If people were brought to give up individual autonomy and to join Mr. Skinner in proclaiming: "To man qua man we readily say good riddance," (p. 201) the behavioral technologists would create a new species and a perfect world. This is the book's thesis.

One expects that an assertion of this kind would be supported by some demonstration or indication of the methods these technologists will use in order to manipulate those non-autonomous bipeds. Curiously enough, there is no such indication in the book. I may be flattering Mr. Skinner, but it occurred to me that perhaps the book itself was intended to be a demonstration of the methods he envisions.

There are certain conditions which the book requires of its readers: (a) Being out of focus. (b) Skimming. (c) Self-doubt. (d) The premise, when confronted with outrageous absurdity: "I don't get it, but he must have reasons for saying it."

These conditions will bring the reader to miss the main ingredients of the book's epistemological method, which are: 1. Equivocation. 2. Substituting metaphors for proof, and examples for definitions. 3. Setting up and knocking down straw men. 4. Mentioning a given notion as controversial, following it up with two or three pages of irrelevant small talk, then mentioning it again and treating it as if it had been proved. 5. Raising valid questions (to indicate that the author is aware of them) and, by the same technique, leaving them unanswered. 6. Overtalking and overloading the reader's consciousness with overelaborate discussions of trivia, then smuggling in enormous essentials without discussion, as if they were incontrovertible. 7. Assuming an authoritarian tone to enunciate dogmatic absolutes - and the more dubious the absolute, the more authoritarian the tone. 8. Providing a brief summary at the end of each chapter, which summary includes, as if they had been proved, notions not included or barely mentioned in the chapter's text.

All of this (and more) is done grossly, crudely, obviously, which leaves the book pockmarked with gaping craters of contradictions, like a moon landscape and as lifelessly dull.

In Atlas Shrugged, I discussed two variants of mysticism: the mystics of spirit and the mystics of muscle, "those who believe in consciousness without existence and those who believe in existence without consciousness. Both demand the surrender of your mind, one to their revelations, the other to their reflexes." I said that their aims are alike: "in matter - the enslavement of man's body, in spirit - the destruction of his mind."

Mr. Skinner is a mystic of muscle - so extreme, complete, all-out a mystic of muscle that one could not use him in fiction: he sounds like a caricature.

At the start of his book, what he demands of his readers is: faith. "In what follows, these issues are discussed 'from a scientific point of view,' but this does not mean that the reader will need to know the details of a scientific analysis of behavior. A mere interpretation will suffice....The instances of behavior cited in what follows are not offered as 'proof' of the interpretation. The proof is to be found in the basic analysis. The principles used in interpreting the instances have a plausibility which would be lacking in principles drawn entirely from casual observation." (Pp. 22-23.)

This means: the proof of Mr. Skinner's theory is inaccessible to the laymen, who must take him on faith, substituting "plausibility" for logic: if his "interpretation" sounds plausible, it means that he has valid ("non-casual") reasons for expounding it. This is offered as scientific epistemology.

(It must be noted that Mr. Skinner's interpretations of the "scientific analysis of behavior" are rejected by a great many experts initiated into its higher mysteries, not only by psychiatrists and by psychologists of different schools, but even by his own fellow-behaviorists.)

As a cover against criticism, Mr. Skinner resorts to the mystics' usual scapegoat: language. "The text will often seem inconsistent. English, like all languages, is full of prescientific terms...but the issues are important to the nonspecialist and need to be discussed in a nontechnical fashion." (Pp. 23-24.) The mystics of spirit accuse language of being "materialistic"; Mr. Skinner accuses it of being "mentalist." Both regard their own theories as ineffable, i.e., incommunicable in language.

Many psychologists are envious of the prestige - and the achievements - of the physical sciences, which they try not to emulate, but to imitate. Mr. Skinner is archetypical in this respect: he is passionately intent on being accepted as a "scientist" and complains that only "Autonomous Man" stands in the way of such acceptance (which, I am sure, is true). Mr. Skinner points out scornfully that primitive men, who were unable to see the difference between living beings and inanimate objects, ascribed the objects' motions to conscious gods or demons, and that science could not begin until this belief was discarded. In the name of science, Mr. Skinner switches defiantly to the other side of the same basic coin: accepting the belief that consciousness is supernatural, he refuses to accept the existence of man's mind.

All human behavior, he asserts, is the product of a process called "operant conditioning" - and all the functions we ascribe to "Autonomous Man" are performed by a single agent called a "reinforcer." In view of the omnipotence ascribed to this agent throughout the book, a definition would have been very helpful, but here is all we get: "When a bit of behavior is followed by a certain kind of consequence, it is more likely to occur again, and a consequence having this effect is called a reinforcer. Food, for example, is a reinforcer to a hungry organism; anything the organism does that is followed by the receipt of food is more likely to be done again whenever the organism is hungry....Negative reinforcers are called aversive in the sense that they are the things organisms 'turn away from.'" (P. 27.)

If you assume this means that a "reinforcer" is something which causes pleasure or pain, you will be wrong, because, on page 107, Mr. Skinner declares: "There is no important causal connection between the reinforcing effect of a stimulus and the feelings to which it gives rise....What is maximized or minimized, or what is ultimately good or bad, are things, not feelings, and men work to achieve them or to avoid them not because of the way they feel but because they are positive or negative reinforcers." Then by what means or process do these "reinforcers" affect man's actions? In the whole of the book, no answer is given.

The only social difference between positive and negative "reinforcers" is the fact that the latter provoke "counterattack" or rebellion, and the former do not. Both are means of controlling man's behavior. "Productive labor, for example, was once the result of punishment: the slave worked to avoid the consequences of not working. Wages exemplify a different principle: a person is paid when he behaves in a given way so that he will continue to behave in that way." (P. 32.)

From this bit of package-dealing, context-dropping, and definition-by-nonessentials, Mr. Skinner slides to the assertion that slave-driving and wage-paying are both "techniques of control," then to the gigantic equivocation which underlies most of the others in his book: that every human relationship, every instance of men dealing with one another, is a form of control. You are "controlled" by the grocer across the street, because if he were not there, you would shop elsewhere. You are controlled by the person who praises you (praise is a "positive reinforcer"), and by the person who blames you (blame is an "aversive reinforcer"), etc., etc., etc.

Here Mr. Skinner revives the ancient saw to the effect that volition is an illusion, because one is not free if one has reasons for one's actions - and that true volition would consist in acting on whim, a causeless, unaccountable, inexplicable

whim exercised in a vacuum, free of any contact with reality.

From this, Mr. Skinner's next step is easy: political freedom, he declares, necessitates the use of "aversive reinforcers," i.e., punishment for evil behavior. Since you are not free anyway, but controlled by everyone at all times, why not let specialists control you in a scientific way and design for you a world consisting of nothing but "positive reinforcers"?

What kind of world would that be? Here, Mr. Skinner seems to make a "Freudian slip": he is surprisingly explicit. "...it should be possible to design a world in which behavior likely to be punished seldom or never occurs. We try to design such a world for those who cannot solve the problem of punishment for themselves, such as babies, retardates, or psychotics, and if it could be done for everyone, much time and energy would be saved." (P. 66.)

"...there is no reason," he declares, "why progress toward a world in which people may be automatically good should be impeded." (P. 67.) No reason at all - provided you are willing to view yourself as a baby, a retardate or a psychotic.

"Dignity" is Mr. Skinner's odd choice of a designation for what is normally called "moral worth" - and he disposes of it by asserting that it consists in gaining the admiration of other people. Through a peculiar jumble of examples, which includes unrequited love, heroic deeds, and scientific (i.e., intellectual) achievements, Mr. Skinner labors to convince us that: "...we are likely to admire behavior more as we understand it less," (p. 53) and: "...the behavior we admire is the behavior we cannot yet explain." (P. 58.) It is mere vanity, he asserts, that makes our heroes cling to "dignity" and resist "scientific" analysis, because, once their achievements are explained, they will deserve no greater admiration - and no greater credit - than anyone else.

This last is the core, essence and purpose of his jumbled argument; the rest of the verbiage is merely a haphazard cover. There is a kind of veiled, subterranean intensity in Mr. Skinner's tired prose whenever he stresses the point that men should be given no credit for their virtues or their achievements. The behavior of a creative genius (my expression, not Mr. Skinner's) is determined by "contingencies of reinforcement," just like the behavior of a criminal, and neither of them can help it, and neither should be admired or blamed. Unlike other modern determinists, Mr. Skinner is not concerned primarily with the elimination of blame, but with the elimination of credit.

This sort of concern is almost self-explanatory. But I did find it surprising that Mr. Skinner includes achievement among the roots of moral worth (of "dignity"). He and I are probably the only two theoreticians who understand - from opposite moral poles - how much depends on this issue.

(To be continued.)

