

Grandfather Frost is substituted as a figure drawn from old Russian folk mythology. Little Soviet children learn to smile. The smiles are not ironic, of course, for young children do not understand irony; but there is something ineffective in them. "In remote out-of-the-way collective farms," Tyrmand says, "the American used to frighten children. Not because an American means anything to people who have never seen one with their own eyes, but precisely because he means nothing and functions as no more than a symbol established by an occasion not subject to control." In a certain Hungarian city, immediately after the suppression of the 1956 insurrection by Soviet tanks, the Communists — with a tact unique to them — erected a monument to Soviet-Hungarian friendship. Passing by it, a boy asked his father, "Daddy, what's that?" "That's a monument to Soviet-Hungarian friendship," came the reply. "But why in our country, Daddy?" the boy asked. (The laugh expected should rattle, not bubble).

In the chapter on Jews, Tyrmand hits one homer after another. As we all know, the Jews as a people are responsible for communism, just as in the Middle Ages they were responsible for epidemics, crop failures, earthquakes, and floods. This explains why Jews in Russia have approximately the same rights as hamsters. Some Jews have been important communists; some have actively participated in the persecution of other Jews in Communist countries; some have been traitors to themselves. Millions, however, have not. Tyrmand describes the status of Communist Jews in a way calculated to unsettle even the most self-centered, apathetic Americans (or Israelis). "It is my conviction," he writes, "that every totalitarian doctrine must violently turn against the Jews in its assumptions and rationalizations. Totalitarian ideologies are by nature utopian and their ultimate goal, theoretical as well as practical, is to create a

definitive vision of the world and life, to establish a static model the finality of which is subject to neither criticism nor modification." (There's more, but as I've said, Tyrmand's translated syntax is just godawful.)

Other chapters "On private initiative," "How to go through a university without losing faith in life" (he scores! he scores!), "How to be a woman," "How to survive a maternity hospital and a state-controlled nursery," "How to take advantage of the invention of the telephone," "How to die" (One should arrange to die at a convenient time, inconspicuously if possible. "This is especially true of prominent people..."), are moderately funny — but why? Do we laugh at Tyrmand's performance? Do we laugh at the whole notion of anyone ever actually living under communism? Do we laugh because we're drunk?

I've had an opportunity to collect quite a number of East European jokes, and though I think my sense of humor is as well developed as anybody's, I don't find the jokes funny, for some reason. Most fit into the category of things we laugh at (in the words of the late Robert Benchley) "to keep the blood back." Tyrmand's book gives us what might be called a lighter view of Marxism-Leninism, something to laugh at when there isn't anything else. But then, the author confesses he "did not write this book for Czechs, Poles, or Ukrainians, because they already know how to live under communism. I wrote it for the people of the democratic West who, when they meet refugees from communism in their countries, are amazed at their bitter, festering, inexpressible, and inarticulate hatred of communism, a hatred which is also full of wisdom. When the refugees are asked why they fled, they have so much to say that they are unable to give a simple, clear, and coherent answer."

Kenneth P. Shorey

Book Review

A New Isolation: Threat or Promise

by Robert W. Tucker
Universe Books, \$6.00

A stranger political coalition may never be assembled than that ragtag band of pacifists, socialists, fellow-travelers, and conservatives that opposed American military intervention abroad in the late 1930s. On the Left were such grand old campaigners as Charles Beard and Norman Thomas; the right wing was graced by Herbert Hoover, Harry Elmer Barnes, and Senator Robert A. Taft. All united as one under the gaudily ecumenical banner of isolationism.

None of these unlikely partners in peace believed that the United States should become literally isolated from the rest of the world, although most argued that such an alternative was at least strategically and economically feasible. What they wanted, simply and to a man, was that the United States forswear entry into a second world war. Those on the Left be-

lieved that American involvement would only usher in military dictatorship at home: fascism through the back door. Conservatives argued that participation in a war would bring on the final triumph of "liberal" collectivism. Herbert Hoover told the Council on Foreign Relations in 1938, "...democracies are first infected by the plausible motives of 'cure the business slump' through so-called economic planning. Every step in this direction requires another And step by step more force and coercion must be applied until all liberty — economic, personal, and political — is lost."

Isolationists of the late 1930s, wary of assigning moral superiority to any belligerent after the excesses of World War I propagandists, refused to acknowledge the *causus belli* of right and wrong. Later, many looked with un-

disguised glee on the possibility of a final military showdown between Stalin and Hitler. (Fascism and communism were as different, Nock observed, as competing brands of toothpaste.) Isolationists believed in the impregnability of the Western Hemisphere (if Hitler couldn't cross the English Channel, they asked, how could he land an army in New Jersey?). They argued for the soundness — moral and strategic — of going it alone internationally and in the powerlessness of the United States to effect lasting changes in the world.

The "new isolationism" proposed by Robert W. Tucker of Johns Hopkins University bears a plausible, but by no means perfect, resemblance to its ill-fated predecessor of less than forty years ago. Both Tucker and his forbears argued that isolation as a policy is best understood metaphorically; neither school pressed for a literal quitting of the world. But while Hoover, Thomas, and Taft believed that the United States owed the world nothing except a good example, Tucker argues for American participation in peaceful international projects and economic aid to the Third World. Central to both old and new schools is the conviction that if necessary, the United States could get along with very little foreign trade. And Tucker, like the old isolationists, eschews moral crusading as the basis of foreign policy.

There is nothing new in the gist of Tucker's analysis; what sets it apart from other anti-interventionist and "realist" arguments is its severity. The United States should not merely withdraw from Indochina and dicker with the Russians for mutual reductions of strength in Europe — it should disown the entire postwar alliance structure, pack up its foreign bases, maintain a respectable nuclear deterrent, and say to hell with everything else.

We will probably never know what would happen if Tucker's book became foreign policy, and given the brashness of his proposals, Tucker himself may be as relieved on that score as the rest of us. His ideas are the stuff that every student of foreign relations has toyed with, Mitty-like, at one time or another. But brashness is not wisdom, and there is much in Tucker's thesis that does not ring true. His view of the Cold War — that it is over — may be premature, and his analysis certainly slights the role an activist American foreign policy has already played in relieving East-West tension. And if the Cold War rekindles, could the United States assume a position of leadership after having forsworn any future international involvement?

What is finally missing from Tucker's "new isolationism" is the abiding mistrust of the state — a mistrust that provided the

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The Bootblack Stand



Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, is celebrating the publication of his new book, which is now available at *avant-garde* bookstores throughout New Jersey. Dr. Plunkitt's book is about the importance of altruism in politics and it is titled *What's in It for Me?* Although Dr. Plunkitt expects to earn ten million dollars from sales of his new book, he has agreed to continue to advise public figures through this column. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, c/o The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

Just yesterday I was lurching in the Senate dining room, rapping with one of my colleagues, a distinguished gentleman of the opposition, a Republican. Lamentably and unfortunately our session became quite hot. We never seemed to settle anything; nothing was resolved. The conversation began to degenerate when I got onto what I suppose you could call my pet subject, the old Gillette Blue Blade. I use it all the time, and I will continue to use it regardless of the new stuff the ad people come out with. And there are thousands of people just like me in lands all around the world. Well as I was saying this he made an unkind remark about the way I eat my soup (I use both hands). Then I told him I just love the decor of the new Howard Johnsons. You know it's so *clean* and their pot pies are yummy! Well he likes Sheratons. So I tried to avoid politics and attempted to brighten up the conversation by saying that I thought Negroes were getting lighter. He exploded. It was too much for me; I knew he had serious problems, but I never

guessed he was a racist. What makes people act that way?

Sincerely,
Senator (Name Withheld)

Dear Senator:

The pull of the planets. I have no doubt in my mind that had the stars, the galaxies, the solar systems, and even a few clouds been in different positions this Republican would have agreed with you — especially about Blue Blades. He would have smiled on your every illumination. Not long ago I too would have taken issue with your declarations on the Blue Blade, but today — as Mars crosses the celestial vault just so — I am moved to reconsider. You see, all fate reposes in the peregrinations of the bodies of the firmament. Trust to the stars. Your colleague, J. William Fulbright from the advanced state of Arkansas, has done as much and his sagacity boggles the mind. Years ago he was a roaring internationalist. Then in the early 1960s he rushed us along the road to Vietnam. Now he is a resolute spokesman for surrounding America with a Great Wall somewhat on the order of that employed by the Ch'in dynasty of old China. Some have called this a tergiversation and a botch. But they have not considered Orion and Sagittarius, Pluto and Saturn. Nightly the Rt. Hon. Fulbright watches this choreography of the universe and he acts accordingly. He can make no error, not in the eyes of those who love cats and read chicken entrails.

—GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

I know you to be an expert on the Court and Constitutional Law.

I am writing a term paper for one of my English professors. It is an honors course. Usually we are not required to write papers. In fact, I have never written any papers. I have dealt extensively with the various aspects of our immorality with respect to the Soviet Union, The People's Republic of China, and North Vietnam. I am a straight "A" student.

My question is this: In light of the present Supreme Court ruling concerning capital punishment, can't we say that all punishment is bad; that is, that punishment of any kind is not a deterrent to

"crime"? I understand very well that we can legislate morality, but I don't see where in our constitutional system we should punish people for their mistakes.

Yours Very Faithfully,
Saylord Pointsett

Dear Master Pointsett:

You deserve the "D" you will probably get in your course, and that as a reward for effort only. The issue is not whether all punishments are or are not cruel and unusual. The point is that successful penalties are forbidden by the Constitution. If Congress fixes a penalty which actually causes people to refrain from committing the crime, then application of the penalty will become a most unusual occurrence, will it not? Then, when the crime has actually ceased to be frequently committed, it will become evident, that the penalty is indeed an unusual one and the SC will be required to declare the penalty unconstitutional and instruct the lower federal courts to devise one or more penalties which will not in fact deter the committing of the crime. Thereafter we can have a situation where the application of the penalty becomes a familiar everyday affair.

You will now see that there has been a higher legal consideration operating among the judges in respect to making life easier for the criminals and the lawyers who live off their crimes. By tightening up the requirements for arrest, trial, conviction, etc., the judges have given both tried and true criminals and would-be criminals assurance that they will get off scot free. This moves each category of *penalties* over into the class of unusual and so finally makes it perfectly clear to dunderheads like you that the judges have a clear, obvious, undeniable obligation to invalidate the penalty. Thereafter, when there is no penalty for the crime, the judges can bear down again and enforce all other constitutional guarantees in favor of the fellow who has been done in by the criminal.

This circular process conforms nicely to older notions of progress and newer ideas of the desirability of constant change, and so finds favor in the eyes of both conservative and liberal wings of the judiciary.

—GWP

theoretical cornerstone for the old isolationism. (A quotation by Senator Fulbright to the effect that a forward foreign policy is incompatible with domestic liberty seems to have satisfied Tucker in this regard.) We can forgive Taft, Hoover, and Barnes an early misreading of the international situation because of their insight into what war might do to swell the already overblown state. Tucker has called for a quitting of America's twenty-five-year vigil. He has advocated what is probably an unwise course, but worse, he has not even done so for the right reasons.

James Grant

WEAVER

(continued from page 4)

gan in 1964 ended in 1968 and have not recurred; campus disruption and violence reached a peak in 1970 and disappeared immediately from public awareness and almost as quickly from the academy itself; the intense waves of public concern over civil rights, the poor, the war, ecology, and other such matters seem to have receded, and nothing has yet taken their place; the New Politics, so expansive in 1968, would appear to have been discredited by the debacle of 1972; the spirit of crisis and confrontation, both foreign and domestic, that pervaded the decade

has largely passed from the scene; the drug revolution, the sexual revolution, radical chic, the mini-skirt, Black Panthers — all have faded from our consciousness. Indeed, the personalities and movements which gave the decade its special character have themselves begun to confess defeat and failure, have become disorganized and demoralized, have, as it were, lost their voices. Add to all this the fact that the past four years of the Nixon Administration, the prospect of four more, and the extraordinary size of Nixon's recent margin of victory. What could be more unassailable than the proposition that the sixties are definitively over?

And yet, until quite recently, the op-