

rather than a more diffuse (and problematic) cultural influence in the society at large.

Books that deplore the passing of an age always make one wonder if things were really so golden in times of old. How good were the "public intellectuals" of the 1930s and 1940s? Is C. Wright Mills—who ended his life as an apologist for Castro—really the paradigm of a committed intellectual? Above all, was New York so inexpensive fifty years ago, taking into account what people earned? Edmund Wilson's diaries for the 1930s and 1940s are full of worries about money, and he, after all, was one of the most productive writers of his time, who never had difficulty placing his articles.

Further, things may not be quite as bad today as Jacoby makes out. Not every contemporary academic has dropped out of the public discourse—the names of James Tuttleton, or Kenneth S. Lynn, or Robert H. Ferrell, or Joseph Epstein immediately come to mind, as do Richard Pipes, Irving Louis Horowitz, and James Q. Wilson. What is new is the think tank-cum-magazine, which has made possible the re-urbanization of a new intellectual class. Many of these are in Washington, D.C.—the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, the Brookings Institution—but some are not. There is the Institute for Contemporary Studies in San Francisco, the Manhattan Institute in New York, and a host of institutions set up to study specific issues relating to individual states of the union, usually located in important regional centers. There are magazines like the *Public Interest/National Interest*, which are soon to be relocated in one center in Washington, but also the *New Criterion* and *Grand Street* in New York and the *Atlantic* in Boston. And, of course, there is the *New Republic*, produced in Washington but owned (and edited) by Martin Peretz, who lives in Cambridge.

Apart from being located in large metropolitan centers, these institutions have something else in common. Their intellectuals face outward; instead of continually bouncing off each other like academics, they carry on dialogue with an ever-changing cast of characters, many of whom are not themselves intellectuals. This not only forces them to speak the language of daily life, but makes them more sensitive to the realities of the everyday world. They are also free from the pressures of peers to conform, since they do not live in the asphyxiating environment of the university town. Small wonder so few are leftists. But it is academia, not intellectual life, which is in trouble in America. That is the book that Jacoby started to write, and one wishes he had tried to finish. □

LAST LETTERS: PRISONS AND PRISONERS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Olivier Blanc/Farrar, Straus and Giroux/\$22.50

William McGurn

"France is nothing but a great scaffold in which the strong kill off the weak in the name of the law." So wrote a health officer named Dufresne in June 1793 to friends in Santo Domingo. It was an imprudent correspondence during the Terror, one that would ultimately cost him his head, condemned for spreading "counter-revolutionary propaganda." Almost two centuries later his last thoughts and those of others like him have been collected and published as *Last Letters: Prisons and Prisoners of the French Revolution*.

As this book makes amply clear, the "crimes" that saw these unfortunates sent to the scaffold ranged from writing to "persons abroad" to trying to hold onto their possessions to just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Olivier Blanc, a French historian, discovered these 153 notes and letters—some dashed off but moments before their authors were carted off to the guillotine—in the Archives Nationales, stuck into the files of the Paris Revolutionary Tribunal with no apparent rhyme or reason. Often eloquent, frequently moving, the bulk of these impassioned farewells have never been published before. Nor, as the author sadly relates, were most ever read by their intended recipients.

The letters do not lend themselves to easy generalization about either the

condemned or the nature of their crimes. Many of the crimes, for example, were financial: people trying to get around the financial decrees of the Revolutionary government by taking advantage of obscure loopholes. Nor do the prisoners themselves fall into definitive categories. Some were undoubtedly bona fide partisans of the ancien régime. Others, such as our friend Dufresne, were people who didn't know how to keep their mouths shut. Still others were genuine revolutionaries who'd somehow fallen out with their *confrères*; one suspects that the Terror saw a good many personal scores settled in the name of revolutionary justice.

The reactions of each of these people are similarly varied, although a certain fearlessness, or at least resignation, is common enough to merit notice. Some believed they would be vindicated by history: "The future will justify me in the opinion of just men and true Republicans," wrote Frederic de Dietrich, mayor of Strasbourg. Others were philosophic: "The events in which I find myself caught up will probably spare me the inconveniences of old age," wrote Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier, a famous French chemist and member of the Academy of Sciences. A good number found solace in religion, like the Comtesse de Trojollif:

Farewell, my poor friend, do not regret me, I die with trust and almost with joy. At what a fine banquet I shall be at this eve-

ning, my friend, I shall await you there; your virtues call you there. I have nothing with which to reproach myself in my conduct towards mankind, I have never had any but feelings of humanity, I sincerely wish the happiness of those who have brought me to the grave; but towards God, my friend, I was not so innocent; I loved Him, but served Him ill. I hope that He will forgive me; so let my friends not weep over my happiness, we shall all be together ere long . . .

Among the most graceful is the letter sent by Marie-Antoinette to her sister-in-law, where the former queen displays a nobility of spirit more alien to her captors than her high birth. In this particular section she also touched on the charges of incest with her eight-year-old son, which the boy repeated at the trial without understanding what he was saying:

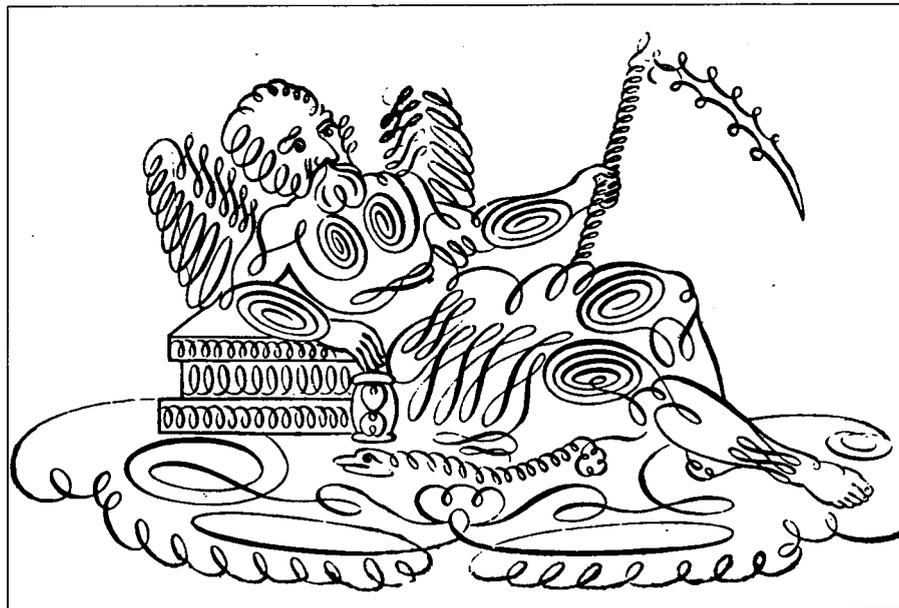
May my son never forget his father's last words, which I repeat to him now: let him never seek to avenge our death. I have to say one thing that is very painful to my heart. I know how much that child must have caused you pain; forgive him, my dear sister; think of his age and how easy it is to make a child say whatever one wishes, and even things that he does not understand; the day will come, I hope, when he will feel all the more the value of your care and your kindness to us both.

Indeed, one of the more remarkable aspects of these letters is the large percentage that do express forgiveness for those who have cost the authors their lives. These appear with such frequency that it is refreshing finally to come across a man who was bitter and did not hesitate to say so, again the unfortunate Monsieur Dufresne, writing to the man who'd denounced him:

I take my eternal farewell of you, villain. I don't know whether you did it on purpose. Though I knew you for a scoundrel, I cannot bring myself to believe that you are also a wicked villain. All I can say is that it is the letters I wrote to you that have brought me to the scaffold. If it was not wickedness, your turn will come soon enough.

Many letters, too, include snippets of advice and a list of debts still outstanding. There is even one charming testimonial to *la difference*, written by the Comte Beugnot. While noting that the male and female prisoners in the Conciergerie were separated by an iron fence, he pointed out that the bars "were not so close together that a Frenchman should ever have reason to despair."

Like any good drama *Last Letters* is not without a villain, the public prosecutor, Antoine-Quentin Fouquier-Tinville. Never does he speak directly, though his shadow hovers over every word. It is to his sense of justice the in-



nocent appeal for clemency and understanding; to him prisoners offer damning evidence about their fellows in hopes of escaping their sentence; in his files the last letters of the condemned come to rest after being intercepted by the court, undelivered, perhaps even unread. Throughout it all his finger points unflinchingly to the guillotine, unmoved by any sense of pity.

Not surprisingly Fouquier-Tinville was himself to feel the guillotine blade when events turned on him. In his rise and fall is the rough paradigm of the totalitarian monster who has come to torment our own century: the faceless bureaucrat who decides life or death not on the basis of what people have done but simply for who they are. In Fouquier-Tinville's own last letter, addressed to his wife, he explains his role with an irony that doubtless escaped him. "I shall die for serving my country with too much zeal, too much application, and for carrying out all the government's wishes, my hands and heart free of all blame," he wrote. Like so many that he sent to the scaffold, he enclosed a locket of his hair. As with those others, too, this last gesture of remembrance would never reach its intended destination.

At the outset Olivier Blanc declares that it was his intention "to let the documents and facts speak for themselves," and by and large he is successful in that. He is less successful in the introduction to each case, where he tries to provide some background on the accused. The confusion here suggests a rushed translation into English, not necessarily a bad one but one that is not always clear because it also fails to explain those details which might be common knowledge to a French readership but need to be fleshed out for a foreign one. In this regard putting the events of these individuals within the larger chronology of the French Revolution itself would have greatly enhanced the work; Fouquier-Tinville's downfall, for example, is flat without it. In short, Blanc would have been well served by a bit of Anglo-Saxon packaging.

Yet the book's corresponding virtue is the author's recognition that the letters are themselves so full of life that it is best to keep them ever in the foreground. His particular achievement here is thus to have rescued the human from the historic, to demonstrate that even while drawing their last breaths on earth men and women will continue to be men and women, with all the contradictions that implies, full of humor, pathos, and charity, as well as an undeniable reserve of fortitude that probably surprised even them. Almost two centuries after they set these emotions to paper, they finally have an audience that appreciates them. □

THE LONG PEACE: INQUIRIES INTO THE HISTORY OF THE COLD WAR

John Lewis Gaddis/Oxford University Press/\$24.95

Joseph Shattan

In the preface to his 1982 study, *Strategies of Containment*, John Lewis Gaddis took his fellow diplomatic historians to task for their lack of interest in the role of ideas. "In their fascination with regional, topical or bureaucratic approaches," he wrote, "they have paid curiously little attention" to the intellectual framework underlying American foreign policy. By contrast, Gaddis approaches diplomatic history almost as though it were a branch of intellectual history. His determination "to recapture what was in the minds of Western leaders" by patiently digging through the archives has made him one of the outstanding diplomatic historians of our day.

Unfortunately, the area that Professor Gaddis has made his specialty, Soviet-American relations, is one in which knowing what went on in the minds of Western policy-makers is insufficient; one has to know something about what the men in the Kremlin were up to, as well. Indeed, a good part of the fascination of Soviet-American relations derives from the interplay of two political cultures with radically different goals, outlooks, and methods. But while Gaddis is a sensitive and imaginative student of American diplomatic history, his knowledge of Soviet affairs leaves much to be desired.

The strengths and weaknesses of John Lewis Gaddis as a historian of postwar diplomacy are well reflected in his most recent collection of essays, *The Long Peace*. Those essays dealing solely with the evolution of American views and strategies are generally superb; they leave the reader with the unmistakable sensation of sailing in first-class historical waters. But then Gaddis shifts his attention to Soviet matters, and suddenly the reader is left stranded in some murky tributary of the social sciences, where facile analogies replace insight, and the clichés of "game theory" and "systems analysis" substitute for thought.

As an example of Gaddis at his best; consider his essay, "Dividing Adversaries: The United States and In-

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ternational Communism, 1945-1958." Here, Gaddis sets out to demolish the widely held view that American policy-makers in the postwar period, bemused by their belief in the "monolithic" nature of international Communism, failed to detect—let alone exploit—the emerging rift in Sino-Soviet relations. In reality, Gaddis argues, American diplomacy was far more sophisticated than is commonly recognized. "Despite what they said in public," he writes, "American policy-makers at no point during the postwar era actually believed in the existence of an international Communist monolith." On the contrary, even before the conquest of the Chinese mainland, they assumed that a Sino-Soviet rift was not only likely, but inevitable.

This conviction sprung from three sources: a healthy respect for the enduring reality of Chinese nationalism and xenophobia, which, it was felt, would make China's Communist leadership increasingly reluctant to subordinate its interests to Moscow's; a contempt for the brutal character of Stalinist diplomacy, which could be relied upon to alienate even the closest of Soviet sympathizers; and the encouraging example of Tito's defiance of Stalin, which seemed to raise the prospect of "Chinese Titoism" emerging in the not too distant future.

Thus it happened that in 1949 President Truman authorized a policy of seeking "to exploit through political and economic means any rifts between

the Chinese Communists and the USSR and between the Stalinist and other elements in China both within and outside of the communist structure." This was to be accomplished primarily by promoting carefully regulated trade between China and the West. The President rejected an alternative strategy of seeking to isolate China, on the grounds that such a policy would only reinforce that nation's dependence on the Soviet Union.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, the Truman Administration's attempts to wean China away from Russia came to grief. But according to Gaddis, American policy-makers never abandoned the hope of exacerbating Sino-Soviet tensions. Even President Eisenhower's redoubtable Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, whose public pronouncements seemed to endorse the idea of "monolithic Communism," in reality believed that an alert and enlightened American diplomacy could pry the two Communist giants apart.

In one significant respect, however, the Eisenhower-Dulles "wedge strategy" differed from the Truman-Acheson approach: whereas the Truman Administration believed in encouraging China's defection from the Soviet bloc through economic inducements, the Eisenhower Administration believed that the best way of provoking a Sino-Soviet split over the long-run was by *increasing* China's dependence on Moscow over the short-run. As Dulles put it to British Prime Minister Churchill and French Foreign Minister Bidault in December 1953:

The best hope for intensifying the strain and difficulties between Communist China and Russia would be to keep the Chinese under maximum pressure rather than by relieving such pressure. . . . Pressure and strain would compel them to make more demands on the USSR which the latter would be unable to meet and the strain would consequently increase. . . . This was the course to be followed rather than to seek to divide the Chinese and the Soviets by a sort of competition with Russia as to who would treat China best.

Professor Gaddis characterizes this approach as an attempt to split the Sino-Soviet alliance through fusion rather than fission. He cites newly released documents to buttress his contention that the Eisenhower Administration's support of Nationalist China during the Quemoy and Matsu crises of 1954-1955 and 1958 did not simply reflect the power of the "China Lobby," but was carefully designed to implement the "wedge through pressure" strategy by forcing the Chinese to turn to Russia for help. Gaddis goes on to point out that students of Chinese-Russian relations believe that Russia's reluctance to provide China with assistance during the two

