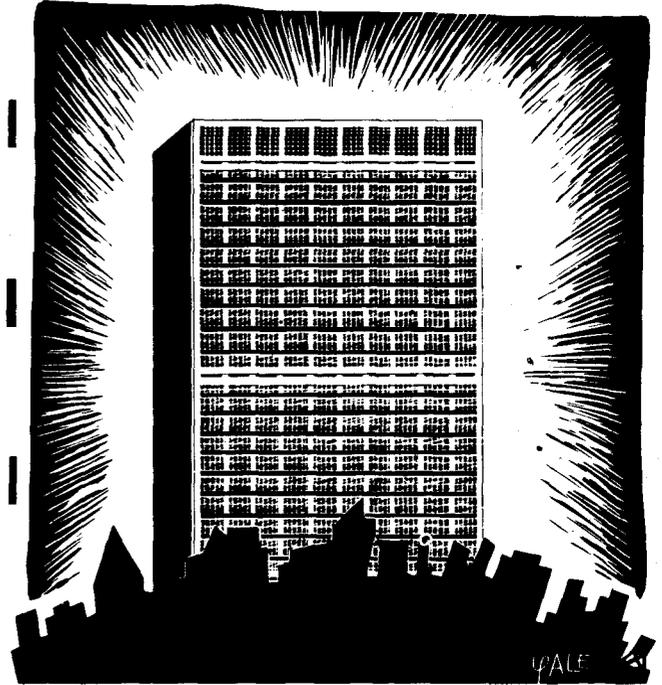


Sermons of Self-Destruction

PETER VIERECK



—Eric Stahlberg.

Peter Viereck

THE SOVIET threat to the West is the most important political fact of our day. Yet many hearts — and even heads — in America, Europe, and India are still crammed with neutralist or even fellow-traveler senti-

ments. Why? And with what arguments can an American abroad or at home answer them? In that connection, I should like to propose and attempt to answer four questions.

1. How can fellow-traveling and neutralism still be so influential today? Because the United States is pictured as the land of lynchings and “hysteria.”

2. What motivates such non-Communist dupes of Communism? Not love of Soviet despotism, but hate of fascist despotism and of American babbitry.

3. What are the chief organs of “softness” towards the Soviet among American and European non-Communist intellectuals? *The Nation* in New York and *The New Statesman* in London.

4. What current literary explosion is a catalyst forcing waverers finally to choose between all-out anti-Stalinism and a new “treason of the clerks”? *The Nation* libel suit against its own former art editor, Clement Greenberg, for protesting its alleged pro-Soviet bias.

Let us consider these four “theses” in detail. The ensuing soul-searching and free debate may produce some small increase of lucidity and good

will in a muddled and ill-tempered atmosphere.

For any serious crusader against the neutralist opiate and the fellow-traveler poison America’s anti-Communism must logically be accompanied by its democratic correlative: a rebirth of the anti-fascist spirit, not as pious lip-service only but as an inspiring foreign policy. Thereby we shall overcome the distrust of Europe’s finest: the veterans of the anti-Nazi underground. A serious anti-Communism (as opposed to a merely demagogic headline-hunting, pseudo-anti-Communism) means no coddling of Nazi war-criminals by our drugstore Machiavellis and a withering contempt for that crew of Falangists, Vichyites, and German collaborationists who now have the impertinence to offer themselves to our great democratic Atlantic union as “allies against Communism.” Self-interest and ethics unite to say: only those who resisted the Hitlerite murderers, not those who appeased them, have the spunk and spirit to smash the Communist murderers today.

Thoughtful Americans rightly abhor the McCarthyism and intolerance of our yellow journalists. Freedom requires two fronts, at home and abroad. But freedom also requires a sense of proportion. The America-baiters in India, Paris, Rome, London, and at home equate the disproportionate misdeeds of America and Russia and then let them cancel out, thus insidiously conditioning their readers to semi-neutrality. The conditioned results are even physical, at least as metaphors: the evasively cynical eyebrow, the glibly defeatist shrug of the shoulder.

But more far-sighted anti-fascists cannot evade the battle against Communism; they will never equate the many flaws of the capitalist West with the unequaled malignancy of Bolshevism, or with the unequaled menace of its Red Army.

OR ARE STALIN’S raging mass-murders and slave-labor camps not fascist but “progressive?” Two dozen years ago America had one single Sacco and Vanzetti case. Ever since millions of Americans have hung their heads in remorse. Rightly so. Yet what is one such case compared to the ten million martyred Saccos and Vanzettis today toiling in the Siberian terror camps? May my country never cease to denounce the lynchings, averaging perhaps one a year, occasionally wrecked by uncontrolled mobs in outlying provinces at home. Yet shall progressives at home, and America-baiters abroad, concentrate on this so exclusively that they stand silent before the thousands of annual government-controlled lynchings and frame-up trials in the Soviet satellites? Was Willie McGee more exclusively worthy of humanitarian tears than Vogeler, Cardinal Mindszenty, or Pitkov?

As a specific example of this false equating and its incalculable damage to the democratic cause, consider the widely-read London *New Statesman*. This is the most maliciously, subtly, and obsessively anti-American organ in the world today. This is the “Great Liberal Magazine” that had editorially urged surrender of the Sudetenland to Hitler long before Chamberlain’s Munich Pact. Today it slanders and profanes the young Americans dying

for U.N. collective security and for refusing to make another Munich Pact. For example, its issue of last January 20 featured some Pravdoid fiction by A. Baron, describing Americans in Korea as murderers, fascist-style racists, and aggressive imperialists.

If we go down, if 1984 is permitted to triumph in the 1950's, then let us at least know where the guilt lies. It lies not only in the aggressions of the Hitlers and Stalins. To some degree perhaps the fatal guilt lies also in the appeasement and in the exaggerations about "American imperialism" spread about by the influential *New Statesman* and by its New York ally, *The Nation*. Their tuggings at the pillars of their own temple are not true liberalism but the liberalism of suicide. (True liberalism and likewise true democratic Socialism are respected by true conservatives as incompatible with Soviet slavery.)

Recently *The New Statesman* unliberally refused to print a letter from Richard Strout refuting their anti-American slanders. At the same time it did print the following letter from that knight-errant of all East-West "peace" congresses, Konni Zilliacus. The Zilliacus document (May 26, 1951) is part of a broader European neutralist campaign. The campaign is directed against "choosing sides" between Russia and the West (as if the victims of Russian aggression have any "choice") and against the "aggressive" Atlantic Pact (a purely defensive pact). Zilliacus's letter, in space denied to Atlantic Pact liberals like Strout, urged appeasement via a Labor Party revolt against its anti-Soviet leadership. Zilliacus concluded: "We must . . . be prepared to go to the lengths of withdrawing our forces from the Far East, getting out of the Atlantic Pact, and sending the American air force home, if the U. S. will not agree with us on how to make peace." In effect, here is what this letter in *The New Statesman* is shouting to Kremlin policy-makers:

"Step forward—hurry, hurry—you Red aggressors and bomb my own beloved democratic England to death. We peace-loving non-Communist liberals are sending you our unmistakable invitation to invasion by removing that Atlantic Pact and that American air force which alone protect England and the West from certain total annihilation."

Father Coughlin's *Social Justice* distracted attention from the real menace, Nazi Germany, by the fake menace of the Elders of Zion. Is *The Nation* perhaps distracting attention from the real menace, Soviet Russia, by scaring its readers with the Elders of Rome? Anti-Semitism is the Social-

ism of the lowbrows. Catholic-baiting is the anti-Semitism of the highbrows. They forget that many Catholics, like the editors of *Commonweal* and Jacques Maritain, are bravely anti-Franco and that Catholics differ from each other politically as much as do Jews or Protestants.

Socialists use the German word "Lumpen-proletariat" ("bum" proletariat) to describe the fascist lowbrows at the bottom of the masses. Let us coin a new American word, "Lumpen-intellectuals," for the Stalinoid highbrows near the top of the literary and journalistic world. Who does not know them, with their dully daring "isms" that have all become "wasms"? Here are six earmarks of the true Lumpen-intellectual (habitat: the United States, Western Europe, and India; never found in the Soviet, since there he is either shot or joins the Party and becomes an Ilya Ehrenburg):

1. He is too pretentiously intellectual to be a Stalinist or read the unrespectable *Daily Worker*. Instead he is a Stalinoid and reads the respectable Red Dean of Canterbury.

2. Being -oid, not -ist, he calls himself neither anti-Communist nor pro-Communist but "non-Communist." Thereby he commits the *trahison des clerics*, evading deliberately the basic moral choice of this decade. Dante reserved a special circle of inferno for the lukewarm indifferent ones. There belong those who still defend neutralism and lukewarm non-Communism when the blood-soaked stones of Magadan, the Lubyanka, and Korea cry out for passionate moral commitment.

3. Like neurotics whose nervous tics prevent them from looking at certain real objects, so the Lumpen-intel-

lectual obsessively avoids certain real subjects: the vast Russian aid eagerly rendered to Germany during the Hitler-Stalin pact; the purge of all Lenin's internationalist Marxist associates; the postwar Soviet anti-Semitic drive; the slave labor camps; the increasing class-lines and pay-differentials between Soviet rich and poor, so much greater than in the capitalist United States of America.

4. He signs Soviet "peace" petitions against atomic war and flocks to fake "peace" conferences. Thereupon he calls any frank free discussion of this ruse "an attempt to suppress free discussion" and self-righteously baits "Red-baiters."

5. For the future or for his bad conscience he put himself on record as sometimes criticizing Russia — and then always adds "but." For example: "The trouble with Uncle Joe, just between us, is that occasionally he uses bad means, mighty bad means, for his wise, idealistic ends — BUT what about all those constant American lynchings?"

6. Being a power-worshipper, he won't vote for the insignificant American Communist Party. Often he never votes at all — are not "both war-monger parties really the same?" What he would like to vote for, he says, is a "healthy, grass-roots, Real American party of the Common Man." By that he means such independent grass-roots as the American "Labor" Party or the contemporary "Progressive" Party.

THIS IS the era of FEPCs and Fair Deals, the most un-reactionary era in American history. In such an era, *The Nation*, *The New Statesman*, and the Lumpen-intellectuals have a hard time finding an American reactionary menace to cancel out the Russian radical menace. Sometimes just when they have an American menace built up it collapses. Then the merry chase resumes: to find a bigger American menace. Two examples:

1. The dismissal of General MacArthur (whether justified or unjustified) was in one way a blow to the fellow-traveler world. *The New Statesman* depended desperately on MacArthur for its increasing circulation and influence. It had just built him up for British readers as the real ruler of America, a menace to equate with Stalin. Then suddenly MacArthur and his strategy were dismissed by the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a Great Debate such as is only possible in a very, very free country.

2. Another menace, built up to cancel out Soviet thought control, was

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—Scott Long in the Minneapolis Tribune.

"Peace in Our Time."

Belles-Lettres. Apparently no student of literary trends has gone to the trouble of tabulating figures as to the approach to their subjects currently most favored by his colleagues. Our guess is that the biographical attack continues to outstrip the purely critical quantitatively with the scholars. A tally of the new books reviewed at length this week suggests the trend: Witter Bynner's "Journey with Genius" (D. H. Lawrence). Vincent Brome's "H. G. Wells," Paul Fatout's "Ambrose Bierce," and Edward C. McAleer's collection of Browning letters, "Dearest Isa," are all based on the supposition that the more a reader knows about an author's life the more he is likely to understand his writing. On the other hand, Norman Nicholson's "H. G. Wells" and Albert J. Guerard's "André Gide" concentrate on analyses of the work of those writers. Walter Mehring's "The Lost Library" (below) is a book sui generis, an appreciation of nineteenth-century culture.

Memories of a Literary Legacy

THE LOST LIBRARY. By Walter Mehring. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 290 pp. \$3.50.

By ROBERT PICK

"THE last place where I felt at home was Vienna," this book begins.

This was before Vienna fell, and I still was surrounded by all the books of my father's library. I cannot remember how often since the view outside my windows has changed—a view more than once obstructed by bars. But in Vienna I still had my legacy of books; they had been salvaged thanks to the Czechoslovak embassy in Berlin, and especially to the efforts of its attaché, Camill Hoffmann, who was a poet belonging to the cabalistic-minded Prague group which numbered among its members Werfel, Meyrink, Kafka, and Capek. Hoffmann was later burned alive in a crematorium.

The heritage of nineteenth-century thought as an imagined guarantee of stableness and security; the lot which, in reality, was to be that of the heirs of the patrimony; the underground means employed to counteract the lawlessness of the guardians of the laws; four writers of consequence, one genius among them; and in the end the great twentieth-century abomination—all the basic themes of Mr. Mehring's book are in this opening paragraph.

It is not easy to classify this volume. Its narrative evolves from fragments of memories which come to the narrator as, in his rented Vienna room, he unpacks the thousands of books once owned by his father. Yet this

is not autobiography, or memoir. It offers the merest indications of Mr. Mehring's accomplishments as a German poet and Continental man of letters; and the tribulations which marked his exile's life are no more than alluded to in various passages. The stories he tells about people he met—great, near-great, and small—are as numerous as they are varied in their importance. His book's index is, among other things, a veritable Who's Who of European Bohemia and literary coffeehouse society between the wars. Experimental writers and artists and founders of ephemeral "isms" are mentioned side by side with a Proust, a Gide, or the impression a Conrad made on young Mehring.

There is no method to the whole of his work. It is confusing at times, and at others in danger of being called a little confused in its epigrammatic briefness; and the informality of the writing, which mixes dead-pan humor, or a kind of tongue-in-cheek nostalgia, with statements of evident great earnestness, is likely to mislead the reader further. But when all is said this volume is virtually a history



of Continental twentieth-century ideas as seen through belles-lettres.

"A man," says Mr. Mehring, "may become as addicted to reading as to any other intoxicant."

You reach for a book as you do for a drink, to escape the depressing banality of newspaper headlines . . . And there's nothing so good as a potent brew of well-aged pathos, preferably distilled in verse. At once you feel cleansed and ennobled. The trouble is you don't stick to the select vintage very long. And in reading as in drinking you incline to mix the cocktails stiffer and stiffer . . .

Whatever the results of such omnivorous reading habits may have been otherwise, they make for much of the charm of the present book. Mr. Mehring with judgment and wit discusses such forgotten, or nearly forgotten, authors as the eighteenth-century satirist Georg Christian Lichtenberg, or the "obscene mystic" Péladan, or A. Sacher-Masoch, or the vagabond Peter Hille, or the poet Theodor Daubler (who, "in my father's darkened study, conjured up improvised ghost stories, while Rainer Maria Rilke, sitting like a specter himself, watched through his lorgnette"). Or he quotes, by the score, from "cultural curiosities" such as Maurice Joly's brilliant anti-Napoleon III booklet from which a plagiarizer in the pay of the Czarist secret police later culled the notorious "Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion," or a seventeenth-century memoir of an excommunicated nun, nymphomaniac, and stockmarket swindler, given him by no other than the constantly furious eschatologist, Léon Bloy.

But how does such obvious delight in the picturesque, the eccentric, the aberrant—in everything done at least *pour épater le bourgeois*—fit into a study of intellectual twentieth-century trends?

In a manner of speaking, Mr. Mehring's book is an extended dialogue with the ghost of his father. To Mehring *père* the printed word was the messenger of enlightenment, the safeguard of reason. He was a Kantian and a "freethinker," a follower of Darwin, Spencer, and Haeckel. He never was shaken in his trust in technological advance, progress, and the "irrefutable truth" of science. He was a foe of tyranny, a German patriot on a roseate 1848 model. But had not Marx been one of those Forty-eighters? Well—

My father would have wished to sleep away a hundred years . . . to awake [in the year] 2000, after the successful operation of the economic cancer of society . . . His image of revolution was an artistic one—the full-bosomed romantic abandon