

The Annealed Intellect of Revolution

The Moulding of Communists
by Frank S. Meyer. Harcourt,
Brace. 214 pp. \$5.00.

by Garry Wills

There are, if anything, too many books on Communism. There are studies of Marx and his writings; histories which chronicle the success of Communism without understanding the reasons for this success; accounts of personal experience and suffering by ex-Communists and the victims of Communism. These books seem to cluster around one of two poles, never freely to move between them: on the one hand, the abstracts and analyses seem to be written in a vacuum where human motive and conflict are nowhere really conceived; on the other, the entirely personal records of men like Arthur Koestler and Whittaker Chambers seem so plunged in personal circumstance that the shape of a general movement is not suggested by the individual drama.

The result of these two tendencies is that the men who have fueled with human determination the vast revolution of this century remain shadowy and almost mythical figures—inhuman robots of reform. The Communist is a walking challenge not only to the military power of the West, but to the historical imagination which has so far failed to come to grips with him.

The material for remedying this situation is now available in a single, well-organized study. Mr. Frank S. Meyer writes out of the lived impact of his years as a Communist teacher and organizer in England and America. But his book is not simply another

ex-Communist's autobiography; nor is it another recitation of the Marxist aims. Mr. Meyer resists the temptation to simplify, to fit into previous categories, what is a major achievement in the shaping of the human spirit, the use of all its resources, in the service of a creed.

Those who think ideological purity has been worn away, in the Communist mind, by the attrition of a power struggle, or that Communist theory is too flimsily founded in man's nature to perdure, underestimate the fusion of human and theoretical concerns which alone could have worked the transformations in human society which we are everywhere witnessing. Mr. Meyer describes in detail the machinery of education and formation which sifts and sears and solidifies, on many levels, the absolute loyalty which is arrived at by those who reach the cadre level of Communist life.

Underneath the processes of mere organization are the various "conversions" which alone make it possible for a man to digest into himself the dichotomies of this lived system. Out of the many accidental and arranged tests comes a hard core who live intimately with purge and apocalypse, Platonic blueprint and Machiavellian bludgeon. The formation of this spirit gives to the cadre Communist an almost monastic ideal, in which the Communist "saint" is not only the means to achieve party objectives but an end in himself. The false god of History has his false Papacy, and Jesuits, and even Franciscans.

To deal with Communism, Mr. Meyer suggests in his thorough study, means to measure the scale of history, the crisis of our time; and, on the other hand, justly to estimate the resources which man can summon up under the threat-

ening weight of an adverse destiny. Communism is a heroic attempt to grapple with the dilemma of history at one of its darkest moments, in an attempt unaided by the historic faiths of the West, by classical paganism or Christianity. A human effort carried on at this level is bound to have repercussions throughout the entire structure of the personality. It is not only obtuse but suicidal to deal with this annealed human instrument as one would with a simple Machiavellian or a day-dreaming idealist.

The surprising thing about Mr. Meyer's book is that he describes the general formation of "the Communist man" without suffering those almost inevitable limitations which follow on the effort to describe a "type." The abstracting of types, no matter how useful clinically, is a reduction of the human richness and complexity; it underestimates the almost infinite resources, not often tapped but always latent, which make man what he is.

All this applies to even the most carefully formulated sociological types. But there is a historical "type" which, considered with the proper reservations, not only does not reduce the complexity of the human struggle, but stands as a monument to man's greatness. It sounds a contradiction, but is a reality, to say that man's very individuality, determination, and adaptability make him able to meet the standards of a certain ideal, under what he conceives to be the imperatives of history. These ideals are not the tags of sociologists, but the battle-cries of history, and they work real changes in man before they even begin to alter his surroundings. Thus there *was* a pagan man, a monastic man, a Renaissance man, an Enlightenment man, a man of the French Revolution. There *is*—and

Mr. Wills, who writes for both political and scholarly journals, has recently completed his doctoral studies at Yale University.

here let us face the development in all its menace and dynamism—a Communist man produced by the most intimate pressures of our time, and producing further pressures that converge with the prior impulsions to shape life in an entirely new pattern.

The Communist is a convinced agent of history, as that history is understood from within by a man trained to think solely in terms of this understanding, this active and passive shaping of time. His philosophy is very literally dialectical and materialistic, so that thought and action cannot be separated. Together they make up part of that conflict which is normative of reality. Only this attitude can explain the series of deliberate tests provoked among themselves by Communists—or, what is the finally determinative stage of Communist training—the series of internal tests and crises which the cadre Communist so structures and sustains that external challenge becomes a natural expression, even a relief, of this tension.

In this mind, and not in a set of historical accidents or embarrassments, are born the union between thought and action, cynicism and idealism, orthodoxy and the swerving policies of pretense. Those things which naive Western spokesmen so often consider the contradictions which will make Communist power crumble are in fact the confirmation of a system built on constructive tension. This is as true of tension between Russia and China as of the struggle between Communism and the West. Some of the most revealing pages in Mr. Meyer's book are devoted to the sessions of "self-accusation" in which rival leaders learn to revel in the self-critical stance which marks them out as formed by and taken into the conflicts of an invincible history. The apparent pettiness of much of this criticism is an essential part of its meaning. As Mr. Meyer puts it: "One aspect of a

good Communist's tone is the reduction of the dramatic to the commonplace and the raising of the commonplace to the significant, all meaning proceeding from the single total dynamic."

As one reads this book, whole worlds constantly under our scrutiny are suddenly, for the first time, *seen*. The "self-criticism" periods which are described seem weird and remote from our experience. But we have all seen the opposite pole of this activity—the pompous row on row of medals which the Russian wears, the "glorious" and "unparalleled" which are applied to every Communist's work. In Mr. Meyer's analysis, these two things are seen as correlates creating that "objectivity" which has supplanted the Western concepts of pride and humility with an ethic entirely different yet intensely felt.

Mr. Meyer describes the formation of the key virtue of objectivity through the patterned attitudes of "dialectical introspection," both in its external organization and in that "gradual displacement of apprehension of the self" toward which the formal sessions are geared. But he insists that the formal and normative actions cannot do the real task of bringing the Communist to that simultaneous self-surrender and self-fulfillment which seems blasphemously close to religious conversion. That final step is taken in the recesses of man's soul, usually triggered by a point of personal bewilderment or pain. When once this point is reached and successfully crossed, the cadre Communist is formed. He is not "graduated" in any external way, but he is recognized and welcomed in that select circle of his fellows who share his experience and help him to mobilize it in the cause of the Party.

To watch in detail the dynamics of Communist training, as set forth in this book's lucid prose, is a fascinating if horrifying experience. One begins to under-

stand the cadre Communist's great fear of excommunication; his even greater fear of any loss of his faith; his personal agony if the surrender of a cosmos is finally demanded of him.

Mr. Meyer's volume is the last in the series on Communism sponsored by the Fund for the Republic. A select bibliography and an enlightening series of quotations in the notes are joined to its step-by-step description of Communist training in theory and practice. There is little of personal anecdote or shared disappointment in Mr. Meyer's volume. Examples are given under the rubric of Comrade X and Comrade Y. Even these anonymous stories are sparsely and effectively used. Where reference is necessary, judicious use of quotation from other experiences is the normal procedure. Only occasionally, and then only in the choice of a metaphor or word—or in the moving Latin dedication to the work—does the author's personal variant of the general experience he describes seem to impel the words. The personal weight of authority can be felt, however, in the care and precision, the lack of over-statement or pleading, which characterize the book. Only an experience in this manner distanced by the resolution to be precise could have resulted in so useful a study. With human sympathy, yet a transcendent loyalty to the ideals which Communists must oppose with their vast arsenal of weapons, Mr. Meyer explores the depths and strengths and weaknesses of that "Communist man" who is shadowy in most Western minds, but who is all too real and solid on the battlefield of history. The Communist achievement in our century is a thing done on the scale of ancient epic. Those whose beliefs involve a considered response to this challenge must, with Mr. Meyer, have the courage to measure the scale of the threat.

The Secretary of State

Edited by Don K. Price. Prentice-Hall, Inc. 200 pp. \$1.95.

This background material prepared for the national meeting of the Eighteenth American Assembly at Arden House last fall includes papers by Paul H. Nitze, Dean Acheson, Robert R. Bowie, Henry M. Wriston, William Y. Elliott, John S. Dickey and Don K. Price, as well as the final report issued by the Assembly and a list of participants.

Socialism and Fascism, 1931-1939

G. D. H. Cole. St. Martin's Press. 351 pp. \$8.

Volume 5 of "A History of Socialist Thought," although kept from completion by the author's death, brings this monumental study to a close with an account of the period immediately preceding World War II.

Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace

Roland H. Bainton. Abingdon Press. 299 pp. \$4.75.

A historical survey of traditional stands taken by the Church on the question of war in the light of their contemporary relevance, this volume undertakes to formulate an ethic compatible with atomic warfare.

National Security in the Nuclear Age

Edited by Gordon B. Turner and Richard D. Challoner. Praeger Paperback. 293 pp. \$1.85.

The major concern of this important collection of essays is, as the editors write, "summed up in the phrase 'limited war'—together with all that this phrase implies in terms of economic mobilization, military organization, logistics, weapons and strategy planning."

The New Nigerian Elite

Hugh H. Smythe and Mabel M. Smythe. Stanford. 196 pp. \$5.

Sociological analysis provides a close view of one country's experience of the problems of political independence, as Nigerians prepared to inherit their country last October.

Africa Today—and Tomorrow

John Hatch. Praeger Paperback. 289 pp. \$1.75.

The history and background of the African peoples, and the complexities of the new order that has arisen in their midst, are treated briefly but comprehensively in this useful book.

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