

children wince. Through all these years, no one has ever been able to put Mr. Nixon over on the press, the intellectuals, or the priggish hordes of suburban and university intellectualoids whose yearnings seem to be for the benign despotisms of the past. Stylistically Mr. Nixon is yuk.

But then so is the chief executive of almost any large corporation, and the gloomy fact is that our Republic has become the largest corporation of all. It needs a competent executive. If he flunks his screen tests, so what? Mr. James Roach, the recently retired chief executive of General Motors, always made excruciatingly painful performances on television. But reasonable and knowledgeable persons do not expect corporation executives to answer questions gracefully or to make women swoon. It is more important that executives ask questions, the right questions, and pound tables if these questions are not answered. Mr. Nixon is competent at asking questions and pounding tables. He is the most competent executive available.

Now if America were a religion, Mr. McGovern would have had my vote. He is capable of moralizing under the most unusual circumstances, and he has convinced me that he worries about my spiritual well-being. I have become acquainted with his homilies, and they, in their quaintness, do not make me feel threatened. But Mr. McGovern as steward of a democratic republic is quite un-

thinkable. He is indistinguishable from the soapbox orators who used to unbosom themselves in Chicago's Bug House Square. His politics drift off towards the crackpot and the bizarre, leaving me to contemplate Mr. Nixon's policies.

The President has expeditiously moved to assure peace on a wider range than was ever anticipated. His concern for human travail seems genuine and only rarely is his realism about human possibilities vitiated by the kind of megalomania that drives governments to undertake the impossible. But most importantly he has proved his competence by directing the corporation through one of the most perilous periods in its history. He did it without whooping it up and disturbing the cows. He seems willing to leave us to our humors. If in the next four years he can trim down the corporation's overhead, fire the handful of petty fixers beneath him, and close down some of the inappropriate and unprofitable divisions, he may be judged one of the great executives of the century. But Americans must swear off the meretricious charms of glamour and religious quackery. They are all too dizzying and dangerous to democratic polity. Even moderate doses of the stuff bring on totalitarian hangovers.

George Nathan



## Movements and Critics

Intellectuals are deservedly famous for being steadfast advocates of progressive ideals. What is less widely acknowledged is that they are also the most volatile and reactionary element in modern political society. This is so for the obvious but often neglected reason that the usual vehicle for the intellectual's pursuit of his progressive ideology is not the party or the interest group, but the oppositional political movement.

Intellectuals' politics are volatile because movements are volatile. A movement is characterized by the absence of structure, formal leadership, or settled goals, and this makes it inherently subject to rapid shifts and changes, especially in a radical direction. It is also in the nature of movements to be, or become, reactionary. A movement is not a movement, after all, unless its adherents exhibit ideological uniformity. The effort to create and sustain such uniformity inevitably makes members of movements hostile to freedom, diversity, and civility.

Moreover, as movements adopt ever more extreme positions, this same insistence on conformity forces them into an ever more resolute denial of reason, intellectual honesty, and humane values. To be sure, every movement worth its salt will be found marching under the banner of progressive goals and speaking the rhetoric of social justice. These goals and that rhetoric are a reality. But a second and coequal reality is that, regardless of its goals, a movement is a movement, and as such possesses an animus against freedom, diversity, civility, reason, honesty, and maturity. Such an animus is the very definition of political reaction.

Periodically, the modern world has been disrupted by movements of this paradoxical variety, and the intellectual community has usually enlisted itself enthusiastically for the duration, with all the predictable, disastrous results for standards of discourse for the intellectual life of the whole. But alongside this pat-

tern, a second, countervailing tendency is also discernable. For whenever movements have flourished, so too have small but influential countermovements, made up of intellectuals who have chosen to resist the *zeitgeist* and who oppose the most reactionary excesses. In doing so, these resisters, whom Peter Steinfelds has termed the "counter intellectuals," have seldom made themselves popular. But they have undeniably leaned against the winds of fashionable reaction; they have made their voices heard; and in the process they have produced some of the most brilliant social criticism and many of the most luminous and enduring defenses of humane values to be found in western literature. Thus, the dialectic of movements and their critics.

At any given point in time, the battle between a movement and its critics seems absurdly one-sided. In a movement's nascency, as its ethos is forged and its first leaders appear, the movement is vastly outnumbered, and its voices are drowned out by a critical chorus of dismissal and derision. Later on, when a movement begins to flourish and approaches the peak of its influence, it is usually the critics who are hopelessly in the minority, at least in the intellectual community, and it is not without reason that they often feel themselves to be voices crying in the wilderness. They discover that their writings, when not disregarded altogether, are received as ill-tempered, ill-informed, simplistic potboilers reflecting only irrational hostility, and unaccountable perversity or some kind of self-interest. Later still, however, after the movement has died out or been destroyed (usually by its own excesses rather than through the power of its critics), it is again the critics who prevail. Their books are widely read and sighted as models of humane clarity, and their lives are admired for their qualities of courage and prescience, and the once-popular leaders and doctrines of the movement against which they tilted are dismissed without a thought.

This dialectic between movements and critics also has a substantive aspect. In their early stages, movements tend to be reformist in character: they identify specific problems and injustices and press for specific redress. At this stage, the critic tends to adopt the somewhat philistine stance of pooh-pooing the notion that there is a serious problem or that anything should be done about it. The movement sometimes then begins to grow. More and more people begin to enlist their sympathy in support of the reformist definition of the problem—and in reaction against the early critics' insensitivity to it. At the same time, however, the leaders of the movement become more extreme, and the definition of the problem becomes ever more sweeping. From having been a specific problem with a specific solution, it becomes a problem inherent in the socio-political system that can be solved only by revolution—and from there it may be further redefined as a problem inherent in life as we know it, so that the solution is nothing less than a recreation of man

(continued on page 21)



Wick Allison

## Memoirs of an Insane Age

The year is measured in semesters.

On the first day of the springs semester, my last semester, I arrived on campus at a comfortable hour and strolled over to the Journalism Building, the one with "veritas vincit omnia" carved in block letters on the concrete staircase leading to the front doors. "Veritas vincit omnia" is bad syntax, but since the occupants of this building were known for their flagrant disregard for syntax and grammar in English, I don't suppose anyone ever bothered about it in Latin.

Inside, shaking my head at the pious inaccuracy of the quotation, I rounded a corner to the left, avoided a collision with a *Daily Texan* reporter interviewing himself, and entered the familiar cluttered precincts of the magazine office. The minute I walked in my heart sank.

Seated at his stool bent over his old accountant's desk was my Nemesis, my Waterloo. We editors called him The Creep, which is more a biological classification than a name. He was actually paid by the university to run errands for the magazine's manager.

I made my way to the composing table with a carefully rehearsed indifference to his existence, sat down at my usual chair, and began poring studiously over the latest issue of the *Texan*. Through the uppermost corner of my right eye I saw T.C. turn and give me his most piercing glower. I knew the hour of madness was at hand. And, God help me, I was all alone. I began peeking around the edges of the paper for a possible weapon.

T.C. fits — the present tense indicating that he still does, if he's still alive, a question which has never bothered me — he fits my ideal image of the successful comic book cartoonist. His red beard, blazing eyes, flushed though barely visible cheeks. His short height. His pointed teeth, and his posture when bent over the accountant's desk. T.C. could have been putting the finishing touches on next month's Daffy Duck series. Instead he was glaring at me and about to speak.

"You're trying to destroy me!"

The screech nearly jolted me from my chair. I knew perfectly well what caused it. I had suggested in a meeting

earlier in the week that the funds spent on our errand-runner might be better used to pay our starving student writers.

"What?" I asked innocently, with my harried professor's interrupted look.

"YOU'RE TRYING TO DESTROY ME!"

His sharp teeth glistened, and I could see down his throat where the tonsils were swelling. I returned to my newspaper, but the printed words were blurred into black streaks. My hands were quivering, my nerves taut. I was prepared for the assault.

T.C. grabbed a Coke bottle. I began to look frantically for a weapon. Swirling thoughts of the courtroom scene belloyed in my mind. No jury in the world would...

T.C. took a healthy swig from the Coke bottle and stalked out of the room. I sighed audibly. I understood the portent of the scene; my last semester at the university, and I was surrounded by madmen. T.C. was only one of them, though more honest than the rest. He didn't pretend to be sane.

The others did. In fact, the others were the most pretentious pretenders I have ever encountered. Madness was in the air that spring, and I was one of the few who had not tasted it, although I couldn't avoid the odor of its presence.

We few sane ones did what we could to shore up each other's flagging courage. Bartlett, eminently practical and stalwartly provincial, would drop by the magazine office to laugh uproariously over the day's editorials in the *Texan*, the curious ramblings of our colleagues down the hall. Bartlett had risen by the sweat of his brow from that favorite of all sociologists' muddles, the lower classes — and he wasn't too pleased by the sudden affection expressed by these long-haired, solidly bourgeois students for the poor, the blacks, the Indians, the dispossessed. As he liked to point out, patronizing affection was a sure signal of social contempt. I often thought his laughter was a bit forced, but we welcomed it nevertheless.

Atkinson, tiredly skeptical and our best wit, would push a beer in my direction and launch into one of his remarkable imitations of the latest campus heroes, reducing their sizeable buffoonery to manageable limits. Atkinson was an in-

explicable paradox to our brethren down the hall. His hair was long, and his clothes were both ragged and stylish, the ultimate in radical apparel. He was often mistaken for one of Them, which gave him a sort of devilish pleasure. He would only add to the confusion by strumming his guitar and reciting Ginsberg.

When matters got really out of hand, I would practice syllogisms and other exercises in logic, sometimes aloud before gathered friends, like a banned priest reciting whispered secrets of salvation. We survived that last semester at an American university, but only by the slimmest of margins.

II

It was the year of Cambodia and Kent State. A year of burnings and marches, bombings and rallies. Higher education in America, which in the best of times proceeds at a snail's pace, came to a grinding halt. The much-proclaimed "end of ideology" was forgotten. This was the biggest year for ideology since 1917. A boom year for sloganeers and poster printers.

I recently read an article by an eminent conservative scholar reflecting on that incredible period. He demanded to know why no students stood up to defend civilized order during the great onslaught of 1970. During that year the eminent conservative scholar must have been in Afghanistan; he was certainly nowhere near an American university.

That was no year for reasoned resistance; to oppose the raging tide was to throw yourself at the mercy of the hurricane. No, we few who remained sane did so only through our cowardice. A minor argument now and then, yes. When things got out of hand, perhaps a sarcastic diatribe in the *Texan* or the magazine. But opposition? The word was meaningless. We gathered in small groups for safety's sake, and we drank very much very often, and we thought only of survival.

Perhaps the root of the madness was Vietnam. It could have been Jamie Wyeth's latest gallery exhibit for all that it mattered. The madness spread beyond all control, and touched everything. If the river of emotion arose from a single source, if the madness had a central purpose or reason, it soon became discon-