

to meet them on an egalitarian basis. True socialism consists not of an externally imposed collectivism but of cooperation with one's fellow workers to produce for use, not profit.

The mere statement of abstract principle sounds both sententious and impractical, but that is because we are so deeply conditioned to equate practical politics with power politics. Even radicals who protest sincerely their attachment to nonviolence often think and speak in terms of externally imposed political solutions. The reason is that the condoning of *some* violence (politely termed, "force") is a prerequisite of any hitherto imaginable form of government, and that to be thought responsible one must work from a policy that has at least a prospect of being imposed through some form of governmental institution or agency in a foreseeable future. To go outside these tacitly agreed limits of respectable discussion, limits which desperately need to be enlarged, is to condemn oneself to the isolation of the utopian Ishmaelite. But when all political discussion is restricted to what can realistically be prescribed for the population as a whole in the light of our existent fears and ambitions, the medicine that is urgently necessary, namely, true analysis of the fundamental causes of our present discontents, is never seriously considered.

The fundamental mistake of all political discussion is its assumption that some men must rule if the rest are to enjoy the indispensable blessings of law and order within and protection from external aggression without. In this way power, the basic cause of the threat of "anarchy" and war, is neatly side-stepped. The magnitude of the problem is impossible to exaggerate, but that is not a reason for evading it. Long-term action needs to be undertaken at the level of psychotherapy, family mores, child nurture and an education, cooperative and not competitive, that is devoted to rearing the whole creative potential of man through the work of his hands and his brain in a life that is not divorced from nature.

The will to power and the disposition to submit are alike products of a lack of genuine creativity and emotional deprivation at the hands of those whose task it was to love us. To seek power is a mark of inner moral sterility and loss of spiritual tranquillity. And this must have been understood from the earliest times, or Jotham could never have conceived of his parable of the trees, as related in the Book of Judges. Neither the olive nor the fig nor the vine was willing to be promoted over the other trees in order to rule over them, because each in the way appointed for it was productive of precious fruit. The trees therefore elected as their king the bramble who was uncreative and clutched at the scepter of office that was proffered him, as a compensation for his deficiencies on other fronts.

# THE BRAMBLE OF POWER

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# THE BRAMBLE OF POWER

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Every age flatters itself on its uniqueness, but it is difficult not to believe that our own age is peculiar for the extent of the breakdown of its established beliefs. Certainly, in retrospect, periods of cultural transition do stand out. Somewhere, for instance, between the burning of Joan of Arc and the death of Copernicus, the fixed certitudes of a unified, feudal Catholic Christendom perished, and out of the ruins emerged the modern world. It began with the belief in Progress, it proceeded to spawn a belief in Democracy, and came finally to rest or rather unrest on the faith of Socialism. Today, this world, with its trinity of Progress, Democracy, Socialism, is itself visibly perishing before our eyes. It is true that the words still evoke a positive response in the minds of many men, but there is a deep and widespread sense of disillusionment and frustration.

It may be objected that this is an unreal way of focusing the map of our cultural universe, since it ignores the deep fissure which is thought to divide existing culture into two warring halves, the great 20th-century chasm between liberalism and communism. Socialism is an unquestioned axiom in one-half of the world, a term of abuse in the other; while democracy, if a universally hallowed term, is translated in contradictory fashion—we are told—by its liberal and Communist adherents. I wish to suggest, nevertheless, that an ethos common to all of mid-20th-century culture transcends the lesser differences within it, that it can be summed up in the trinity of animating beliefs, Progress, Democracy, Socialism. Further, that this ethos, which has shaped the thinking of intellectuals throughout the world on both sides of the ideological curtain, is itself now being challenged at its roots and increasingly found wanting.

First, consider Progress. Insofar as the concept is concerned with securing the moral improvement of mankind, it is beyond criticism; but there is a quite different meaning attached to the idea of progress, and it has done much to shape the world in which we live. The medieval world was static in that the map of knowledge was fixed by the authority of the ancients, the Scriptures, and insofar as these required authoritative exegesis, the Church, one and indivisible. The Copernican revolution toppled all those authorities at a single blow; the new method as elaborated by Bacon, Descartes and Pascal insured that the theory of knowledge itself was henceforth dynamic, self-correcting and self-perpetuating, grounded not in authority but in experience and reason, common to all men. The reason why this revolution soon swept everything before it, why the authority of religion came to be superseded by the

authority of science, was simply that knowledge, as Bacon explained, was power. The scientists themselves, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, even Galileo Galilei, may have been animated largely by the love of knowledge and the inimitable satisfaction that comes from enlarging the understanding; but lesser men were excited by the unlimited prospects for power over nature opened to them by the mastery of such controlling keys. In short, although science was destined to be an easy victor in its battle with religion by virtue of its claim to have an unrivaled means to advance human riches and material well-being, the reason for the increasingly uncritical worship of progress lay in its immense emotional appeal to the root human appetite for power—power first over nature and through that, power over other men.

The theory of Democracy was implicit both in the scientific revolution and in the Reformation, for in each case the appeal was against authority to the common stock of reason available in every man. The appeal to reason was implicitly an appeal to the equality of the individual insofar as no class, church, state or any other group could claim to have any monopoly of reason. But how was the reason of large numbers of individuals to be translated into effective political action; how were the wills of feudal aristocrats to be supplanted by the wills of common people? There seemed only one solution in logic that could meet the problem, and representation based on suffrage became the legitimizing principle of state sovereignty.

Although Rousseau had long since stated the obvious—that will cannot be represented—people in the 19th century had an overwhelming need to deceive themselves that it could, and the logic of *representative* government carried everything before it. It was tacitly agreed to ignore Rousseau's tactless insistence on the illusion of supposing that a few could take decisions involving large numbers without doing violence to their essential liberties, no matter how intricate or sophisticated the balloting arrangements of the electoral process. Henceforth, every state was required to prove its legitimacy by becoming democratic. That is, the people, generally defined as all adults of sound mind over the age of 21, were to have the right to say yea or nay at fairly regular intervals to certain political groups who sought the right to govern. The purpose of government naturally remained what it had always been, the exercise of power. So democracy like progress harnessed to its chariot the enormous energy of the human appetite for power.

The demand for Socialism originally was no more than the application by people living in a capitalist society of the democratic principle of equality to the economic life of the community. It is impossible to defend capitalism as a rational and just mode of organizing economic activity. Belloc, who loathed it, defined capitalism briefly as "the planned exploitation of the majority of non-owners by the minority who are owners." Keynes, who defended it, had this to say: "For modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious, without internal union, without much public spirit, often though not always, a mere congeries of possessors and pursuers." Socialism, as so far practiced, consists of

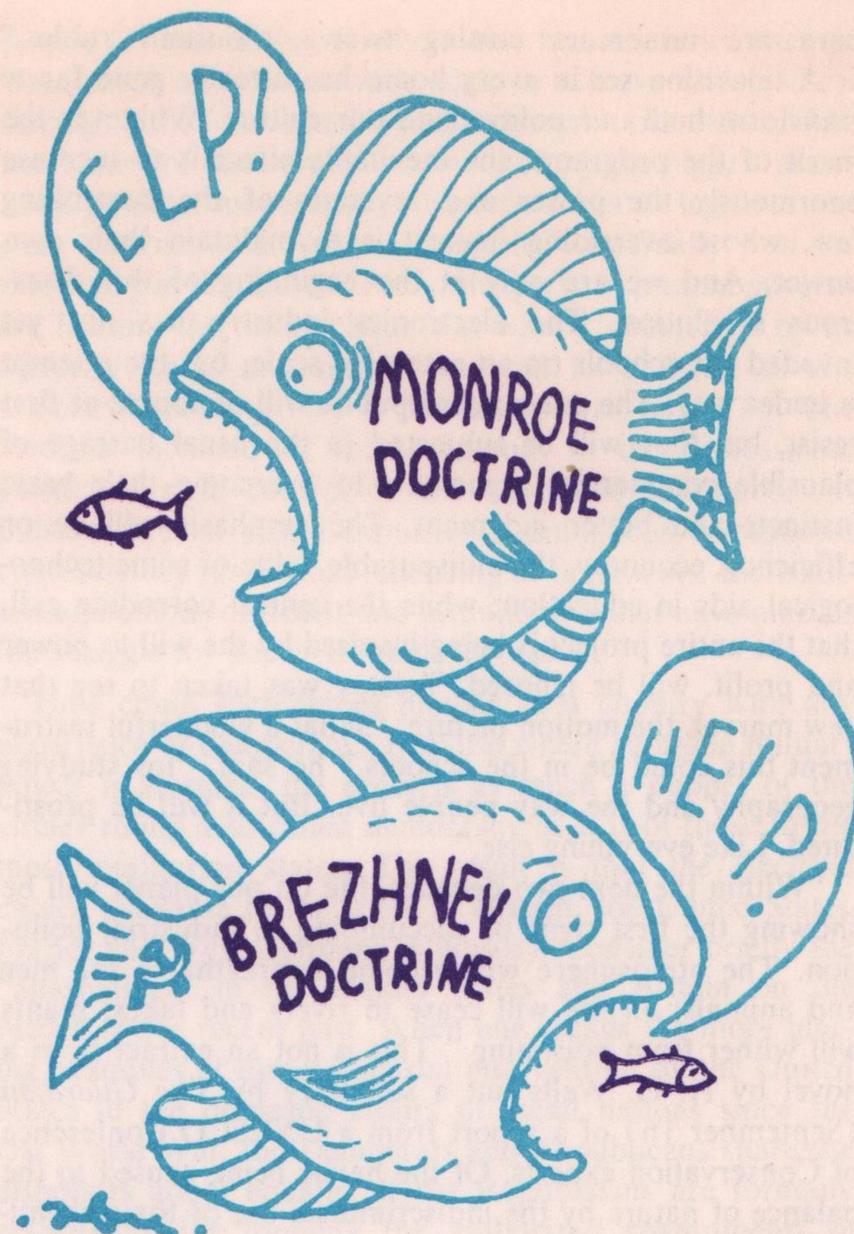
transferring either by expropriation or compensation the ownership of capital and the instruments of production from private hands to public agencies. The intent was to abolish the profit motive and, by removing immense sums of unearned wealth from private control, to re-establish on behalf of the community the right to manage its own economic life. Though there was much else in the Socialist aspiration, that is what has resulted so far—almost completely in the Eastern countries of the Communist world, and partially so in the “mixed” (capitalist-dominated) economies of the West. All public ownership in both East and West has taken the form of nationalization (except for a very small degree of municipal ownership of local utilities). And a nationalized industry is neither owned nor directed by the workers, consumers or any other members of the public at large; it is controlled, directly or indirectly, by the government.

Socialism may have been responsible for raising the material standard of life of the workers, it may have brought about a more just distribution of income—and these are important gains—but one indisputable consequence of “socialism,” as so far experienced everywhere, has been to add enormously to the existing power of the minority who wield political sovereignty, a power which has become, if not greater than under capitalism, certainly not less. (It is very difficult to separate the variables in order to make a judgment. Obviously there is less overt dissent in the USSR than in the United States or in Britain, but this disparity cannot by any means be attributed simply to the differences of economic system.) In short, “socialism” also has served to give an immense boost to the concentration of power.

Taken together, these interacting aggrandizements of power in the scientific and technical, the political and economic spheres have been instrumental in promoting a staggering world-wide increase of military power, or power in its purest form. The demands of this military power have in turn become insatiable, and are now so great that they cannot be met except by continent-wide superpowers, which alone command the necessary resources. The United States, the USSR and China are already in the category, and Europe is striving toward unification in order not to be excluded outright from big-power status in the League of the Giants.

I hold that the culture of modern man is profoundly secular, empirical, pragmatic, even (in a manner of speaking) egalitarian, resting on the three pillars of Progress, Democracy and Socialism; that this culture is bankrupt and is leading us to total disaster because it has consistently turned a blind eye to the fact that its apparent idealism has in fact masked that source of all evil, the love of power. The charge is sweeping but can be sustained, I believe, by a closer look at the pass to which we have been brought by a misguided faith in Progress, Democracy and Socialism.

Many in the 18th and 19th centuries believed that all the world needed was to rid itself of the residual traces of superstition, scholasticism, authoritarian ecclesiasticism. Knowledge and reason, thus unfettered, would then lead man to ever-increasing prosperity and happiness. The



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spirits of Voltaire, Comte and Mill, the embodiments of liberal optimism and rationalism, live on in our midst, yet observe some of the “blessings” of latter-day progress. In what is still called “defense,” the engines of destruction and their means of delivery in speed, accuracy and length of trajectory have developed to incredible lengths. Not only is it possible to exterminate whole cities in a matter of seconds; but the machinery, a vast labyrinthine organization, is already in being throughout the world to carry out such a project, immediately the alleged deterrent should fail to work.

In addition to the threats of “defense,” we have learned to accept as normal a mode of transport which in Britain alone kills more than 7,000 persons a year and injures up to 400,000. In the air the British and the French are competing with the United States and Russia for the “honor” of pioneering supersonic aircraft—which “achievement,” if ever permitted, would at grotesque cost become an unprecedented scourge to the hundreds of millions living beneath the supersonic boom carpet. Even the less thoughtful are beginning to realize that new knowledge of potential benefit to mankind, far from representing inevitable gain, may only too probably become a curse, once the possibilities of its prostitution have been grasped by the impulses to power and profit, and with those impulses determining the priorities. Tolstoy lived long enough to be shown the motorcar. He commented: “Motorcars, in our Russian world! There are people who have no shoes, and

here are motorcars costing twelve thousand rubles."

A television set in every home has already gone far to transform both our politics and our culture. Whatever the merit of the programs, the inevitable effect is to increase enormously the power and revenues of the controlling few, whose overriding interest is to maintain their own power. And we are only at the beginning of this disastrous revolution. The electronics industry has not yet invaded the schools on an extensive scale, but the attempt is under way. The educational public will of course at first resist, but they will be subjected to the usual barrage of plausible commercial arguments to overcome their basic instincts and better judgment. The emphasis will be on efficiency, economy, the indisputable value of some technological aids in education; while the central corroding evil, that the entire project is being inspired by the will to power and profit, will be ignored. Tolstoy was taken to see that new marvel, the motion picture. "What a wonderful instrument this could be in the schools," he said, "for studying geography and the way people live. But it will be prostituted. Like everything else."

"Within the next two decades, life on our planet will be showing the first signs of succumbing to industrial pollution. The atmosphere will become unbreathable for men and animals; all life will cease in rivers and lakes; plants will wither from poisoning." This is not an extract from a novel by H. G. Wells but a summary by *The Guardian* (September 16) of a report from a UNESCO Conference of Conservation experts. Of the havoc being caused to the balance of nature by the indiscriminate use of toxic chemicals as pesticides in agriculture, we have been warned at length by Rachel Carson and others. From the world of "pure" science, more and more reports filter through to suggest that human beings are actually engaged in experiments to mutate and reconstruct artificially the very genes which make us into human beings, further than which it is not possible for perversion to go. These terrible dangers arise directly from the fact that the huge numbers of scientists and technologists, East and West, have been reared from earliest childhood in a false metaphysic by which they either delude themselves that they have no responsibility as scientists for the ultimate purpose of their researches, or alternatively that they are pragmatists manipulating matter according to the dialectical principles animating nature.

It is not easy to decide how much space to devote to the issue of contemporary democracy. To tens of millions the ritual of voting is a cornerstone of civilization; the habit has become a reflex action, like making sure that everything is locked up before going to bed (the ultimate reason for government itself, as Hobbes pointed out). Nevertheless, inexorable fact rules here, as among other sacred customs, and the facts have now become so clear as to be increasingly visible even to people conditioned by intensive indoctrination.

While the phenomena of Executive government, machine politics, managerial administration and public relations manipulation are to be found in all "democratic" industrialized states, nowhere has the fraud of the democratic façade become more crudely evident than in Britain. The

reason for this is that nowhere else has a serious attempt been made on a nation-wide scale to achieve disarmament through the accepted constitutional channels. The machinery of democracy was invoked by the biggest grassroots political movement of modern times to legislate nuclear disarmament. When a majority was finally won for this policy in the Labour Party, the party at present governing Britain, the ruling clique was wholly undeterred by its minority status and simply declared its defiance of the majority, knowing that it had the power to do so. The methods included all the techniques of the professional politician: rigid control of key candidate selections, expulsion threats, actual expulsions, ambiguous resolutions, contradictory resolutions, silencing of opponents, the traditional methods of deceit and intimidation that have marked the struggle for power through the ages.

How could such things happen in a country with any experience of democracy? Because where supreme military power is at stake, the press is as much a puppet of the circles ruling a so-called democracy as it is of those in the most totalitarian states. The result is that the electoral choice available to the voter in Britain, the United States, France and West Germany is illusory. Consider briefly the "alternatives" in the United States and Britain on the record of the recent past. When one recalls the more glaring examples of direct imperial intervention by the United States in the domestic affairs of small nations since the last World War, the Democrats and Republicans share the dishonors about equally. If the Republicans are formally responsible for toppling the authorized governments of Iran (Mossadegh) and Guatemala, the Democrats must take the blame for Greece, Santo Domingo and Cuba. Vietnam, a crime *sui generis*, is a responsibility fully shared by both parties. Whoever occupies the White House, the CIA remains. Britain under the Tories witnessed the abortive buccaneering exploit of Suez, the war in Cyprus, the atrocities of the Hola camp in Kenya, the setting up of the Central African Federation in the teeth of united African protest, and at home fiscal concessions to the rich in a framework of economic inflation. The Labour Party, elected to office in the name of socialism, has been Lyndon Johnson's most servile ally in Vietnam, has gassed people in Aden, betrayed the Africans in Rhodesia, supplied arms to slaughter and starve the people of Biafra despite the disgust of the entire nation, and recognized the Greek colonels in Athens. At home, it has introduced apartheid into the Commonwealth Immigration Act, abolished the principle of a free health service, drastically cut back the education program, increased unemployment by deflationary measures, and threatened to make strikes illegal. Such choices as these constitute the democratic freedoms of the common man.

Socialism, in practice as distinct from theory, has come to be equated with the principle of public ownership or nationalization. In the West, it has been carried out on only a limited scale, and is therefore difficult to evaluate. All one can say is that the structure of command, the morale of the workers, the quality of human relations are not markedly different in the public and private sectors.

Certainly there is no longer any disposition to embrace public ownership as a panacea for social and economic problems.

Of the Communist countries, where public ownership is total or virtually so, it must be observed that, since no individuals can make profit out of the ownership of the means of production, great private fortunes have been eliminated and the power of money as such has been drastically shorn; but that inequality of remuneration for labor remains the basic distributive principle as in the West. Moreover, the Socialist structure of military power, the volume of "defense" expenditure, the astronomical sums spent on the lunacy of the space race, are parallel to those of the West—and the economic burden on a society not so far advanced industrially is correspondingly greater.

Both the Hungarians and the Czechs have experienced direct and brutal external intervention in their internal affairs. Internally throughout the Communist countries, the private individual has even less ability to dissent from or protest against public policy than he does in the West. There was a certain irony (in which we can take no pleasure) in the fact that during the May days, many of the radical dissenters in Paris looked ideologically to Marx, while dissent in Czechoslovakia looked enviously on the possibilities for protest open to Western students and workers. The other important point to note about "Socialist" experience is that people in Communist countries feel the same hunger for consumer goods and urban amenities as do those in the West. The disastrous 20th-century movement from the countryside to the town, with the resultant concentration of populations in megalopolis, and the denuding of the rural areas, is not a malaise peculiar to capitalist-dominated economies but is a world-wide phenomenon.

The culture of the entire modern world—both in the collectivist, materialist half and in the individualist, materialist half—is governed by the three principles of Progress, Democracy and Socialism, with consequences that by any sane human values are now intolerable and that must inevitably become worse. What went wrong? There was nothing but excellence in the principles themselves. Why then is it such a sterile, disillusioning experience to read now the zealous reformers of yesterday, the writings of progressive intellectuals of the 18th century, of the Victorians and even—I had almost said especially—of the 1930s? The writings, that is, of Wells, Cole, Laski, Strachey, the Webbs, Tawney, Keynes. The only exception is Russell, and the exception is significant. Russell is the only one who has had any real grasp of the true nature of power.

The trouble with all the other progressives, democrats and Socialists, was that they not only failed to diagnose the true evil of power but actually depended on it as the indispensable means of implementing their ideals and reforms. A ritualistic genuflection was felt to be obligatory from time to time in the direction of Acton's hackneyed dictum, but the general assumption was that it hung there as a warning to us lest we should stray from the strict path of liberal parliamentarianism and fall into the kind of military junta despotism associated with the Balkans, the Middle

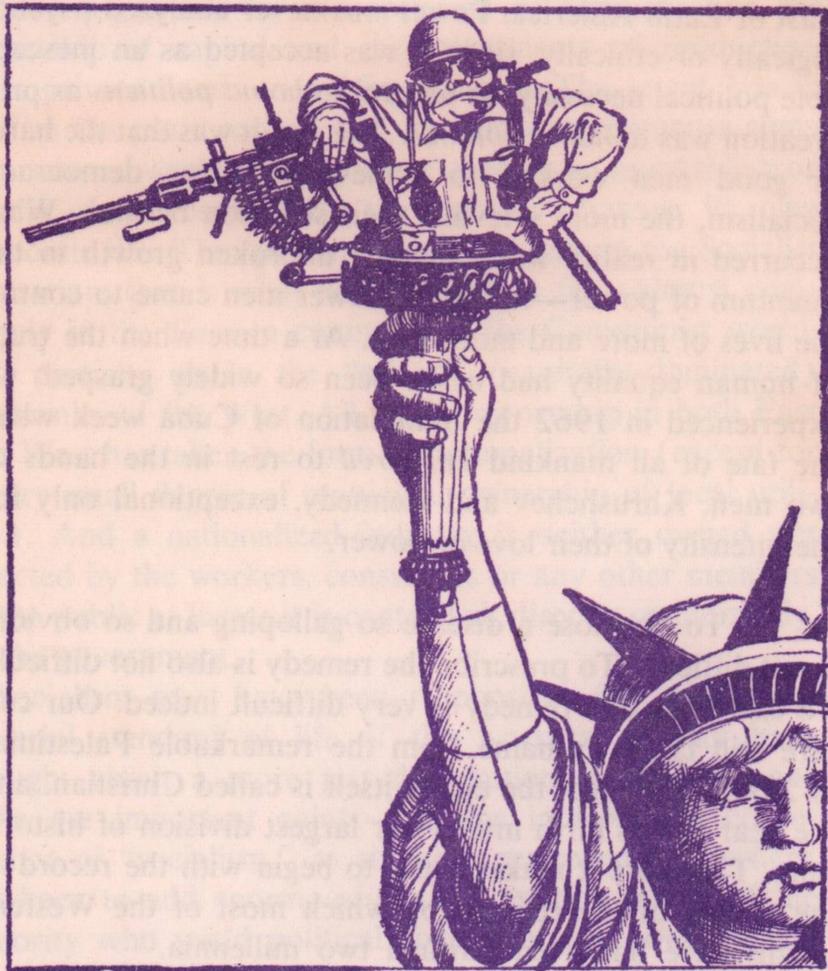
East or Latin America. Power was never analyzed psychologically or ethically, since it was accepted as an inescapable political necessity, as natural to *homo politicus* as procreation was to *homo libidinis*. The result was that the harder good men worked to achieve progress, democracy, socialism, the more grievous their situation became. What occurred in reality was a steady, unbroken growth in the quantum of power—fewer and fewer men came to control the lives of more and more men. At a time when the truth of human equality had never been so widely grasped, we experienced in 1962 the humiliation of Cuba week when the fate of all mankind *appeared* to rest in the hands of two men, Khrushchev and Kennedy, exceptional only for the intensity of their love of power.

To diagnose a disease so galloping and so obvious is not difficult. To prescribe the remedy is also not difficult. To carry out that remedy is very difficult indeed. Our culture still takes its name from the remarkable Palestinian of 2,000 years ago; the epoch itself is called Christian, and the year of His birth marks our largest division of historic time. Therefore it makes sense to begin with the record of the origins of the religion by which most of the Western Hemisphere has lived through two millennia.

The significance of the New Testament lies not in its recommendation of any political program or policy. Had it done so, it would have perished in a season, for nowhere is the smell of death so sharp as over yesterday's politics. Its significance rests in its discussion of how the individual ought to conduct himself in this world. It concerns itself with the religious problem of the meaning of human life, in order to elucidate the nature of a man's obligation to God and to his neighbor. At the same time, the Gospels cannot in any sense be described as apolitical. They not only abound with references to the state, the military, the tax gatherers, the rich, the clergy; they provide us with the classic confrontation of Caesar and the religious dissenter. Jesus was judicially murdered by crucifixion not because he attacked the state directly. He did not do so, nor did he urge his friends to do so. But he did insist that a man's obligation to God necessitated that he should behave toward his neighbor in a manner that ran directly counter to the way in which the authorities in church and state conducted their relations with those who allegedly owed them allegiance.

Moreover, Jesus taught that, while a man should always return good for evil and give even more than was expected or asked of him, he should under no circumstances obey an evil will in order to avoid conflict, he should not forfeit his own right to refrain at all times from coercing others. But if all men followed such a nostrum, it would totally destroy state power; even a few brave men who were beyond the reach of intimidation could constitute a serious threat to that power. Such individuals were accordingly put to death: Jesus, Peter, Paul, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Maximilianus, Marcellus the centurion, to name but a few.

Their courage inspired many others; but with the growth in numbers the extraordinary quality of the response diminished, and various compromises were introduced to enable the less heroic to avoid paying penalties they very



Donato, Toronto Telegram (Canada)

naturally felt unable to meet. Moreover, their own leaders acquired a taste for leadership and organization. The most obvious compromise was to acquiesce in the minimum demands of the state, to concede legitimacy to a purely political sphere of human activity, and that is what (with recurring exceptions of small "heretic" minorities) the vast majority of "Christians" have been doing ever since. We have been doing it for so long that over wide areas understanding has been lost of the fact that power and conscience must inevitably clash. When men have set out on this slippery slope, there is no logical place to draw the line beyond which not another inch will be yielded to state power. Step by step, we are led onward, until we reach the ultimate betrayal where reside the Machiavellis and the de Maistres to claim moral legitimacy for Kratos, power, Caesar, the state in its own right, spinning its own self-authentication out of the logic of its own requirements. The safety of the people is the supreme law, and by the safety of the people is meant the preservation of the existing power structures. When men begin to listen respectfully to such views, it is only a matter of time before they pay the price of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and all the horrors of totalitarian power.

However, in contemporary political thought, insofar as there can be said to be any, we have to deal with a defense of politics in more muted terms. The specifically political arena seeks our rational support in the guise of a quasi-judicial, democratic arbitrator, the alleged thermometer of "consensus." According to this analysis, the "virtuous" or "legitimate" power is the one which recognizes that in a human world the quest for power is an inescapable reality, accepts the struggle and seeks itself to hold the ropes and play the part of honest broker. The ferocity of the struggle for power is mitigated by liberal parliamen-

tary discussion and debate, aided by a multiplicity of pressure groups and voluntary associations designed to elucidate the lowest common multiple of general agreement. Once this consensus has been obtained, the democratic solution is benevolently imposed by the government as a good, impartial judge, eager only to command the widest possible area of consent.

This analysis is specious and dishonest in that it fails entirely to look into the question of the nature of power itself. It studiously ignores the fact that virtue cannot by any conceivable logic dwell together with power; that the power arena is necessarily confined exclusively to the big battalions, access to which is neither desired by nor permitted to virtue; that the so-called consensus makers, if not themselves the voices of enormously wealthy vested interests must take those interests into account in order that they should be seen to speak "realistically."

From the standpoint of mending our existing grievous situation, "realistic" recommendations—that is, those which reflect the existing distribution of power and prejudice—are quite futile. It is they that have caused our troubles, and an answer in terms of realistic politics is therefore not possible. The politicians are demonstrably impotent, except to go on doing more damage. True values can realize themselves in the life of the individual only by nonpower means. Without intending to do so, individuals who govern their lives by love of truth, and who are consequently possessed of conviction and integrity, cannot but encourage and strengthen the rest of us in a similar quest. For one thing, they are seen to be both disinterested and consistent, as well as free from the circumlocutions, ambiguities and equivocations which inevitably characterize the utterances of those who are bound not by truth but by the demands of the political market.

No power figure, no officeholder can in the nature of things afford corresponding convictions. He is obliged by the requirements of his position, by consideration of how much truth the public will bear, to make vacillatory, opinion-poll-veering pronouncements. That is the price of office, of "responsibility." If the process is sustained long enough, and depending on how close the particular officeholder draws to the apex of power, the inner fortress of the soul must itself be threatened. At the height of their power, a Caesar, a Charlemagne, a Napoleon, a Hitler and their pocket contemporaries pay a terrible price. They are simulacra, power puppets. All power corrupts absolutely.

Only by appealing to the private individual can we give meaning to the legitimate ideals of Progress, Democracy and Socialism. We shall do so not by fashioning yet another political party, inscribing new slogans and policies on its masthead, in order to strive by power means—that is, external coercive means—to legislate men into goodness. That is like setting out to square the circle or to make hot ice. The effect of substituting true values for false ones must ultimately be reflected in the external behavior of the individuals concerned. True progress consists not of learning to be more acquisitive or faster moving but of learning to renounce powerfully felt desires. True democracy consists not of joining a party or caucus and manipulating a mass public of passive voters but of striving to learn the genuine needs of one's immediate neighbor and attempting