


either capitalism or socialism, but *liberalisme impérialiste* and *marxisme*," and who was attacked from both the left and the right; a Frenchman and an Algerian who "approved nothing of what was being said on the right or the left" in the Algerian crisis and who was torn apart by it; a moralist and philosopher with an anarchist's and poet's heart; an insightful man who could write in his notebook strangely contradictory words "To set-

tle into the natural but with one's mask."

It has taken nineteen years for a biography such as this to be written, and it is hard to imagine it being superseded for years to come. One can imagine Camus saying with Hamlet: "O, I could tell you-/But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;/Thou livest; report to me and my cause aright/To the unsatisfied." Herbert Lottman has done just that. 

Before the Sabbath by Eric Hoffer

(Harper & Row; 144 pp.; \$7.95)

Roy Meador

What makes Hoffer run from book to book, filling his 3 x 5 cards with reading quotes, his notebooks with brisk aphorisms from thought-burdened strolls in Golden Gate Park? Anger, habit, zest for the chase?

Hoffer is in his seventies now, retired from longshoreman labors on the San Francisco waterfront. Time has demoted him from stevedore-philosopher to simply philosopher. Born in 1902, he remains a tireless child of the twentieth century, and this new book proves he is still thinking hard, with a sturdy pen in his work-tough hand. "I love ideas as much as I love women," he writes, and ideas there are aplenty. In *Before the Sabbath* they strike sparks with the same cantankerous impact that shaped Hoffer's eight earlier books, beginning with *The True Believer* in 1951.

Continuing the journal format of his *Working and Thinking on the Waterfront*, this book is a six-month diary (November, 1974-May, 1975). Hoffer set himself the assignment wondering if "at the age of seventy-two my mind was played out." His plan was "To sluice my mind the way I sluiced dirt in my gold-hunting days" and to give himself "a blissful Sabbath" when the task was done.

At the end, Hoffer's own (accurate) assessment is that "the diary flows, reads well, and has something striking on almost every page." His original hope was that he might in the experi-

ment find "a new train of thought to chew on" and thinks he has it in something defined as the "human factor" now complicating the neat equations of modern technology, automation, economic theory, and civilized development. The "human factor" doesn't seem an especially original discovery in social and political thought, but if it keeps Hoffer chewing, we should not complain. If his discovery seems obvious, one recalls what Hoffer told Eric Sevareid a dozen years ago: "The purpose of philosophers is to show people what is right under their noses."

"Who slew America's hope?"

The work is a typical Hoffer hodgepodge of ideas, argued with his familiar sharpness and sledgehammer finesse. Hofferites are well trained to smile tolerantly at the balderdash and to keep reading. His calm recommendation of retirement at forty and his argument that "our time cries out for child labor" are more than compensated for by persuasive Hofferisms that provide new insights. His epigrammatic skills are undiminished. The

rampaging maxims, chilled before serving, and steel-honed apothegms that made Hofferitis contagious and often incurable, from *True Believer* on, are still abundant. The diary format lets him romp freely among ideas, books, subjects, personal reminiscences, reflections, prides and prejudices, like a tourist with time and money to go where he pleases.


Hoffer remains fond of blithe generalization: "The sickness of the twentieth century has been cowardice.... Anger is the only cure for cowardice." He attacks his regular targets with his usual glib bluntness. Intellectuals, among his most loyal readers for years, will again enjoy Hoffer working them over with a verbal shillelagh. Who slew America's hope? We all did, he insists, but "the murder weapon was forged in the radical-chic salons of Manhattan and Washington, and in the word factories of our foremost universities." Always a man of the word, Hoffer explains afresh why words have been more dangerous in this century than any other.

We read about the Soviet Union, which "has neither soviets nor unions." About Israel, which is "the foremost authority on national survival." About Nixon, the "opportunist who missed his greatest opportunity." About the sins of the rich, the unbelievable ignorance of the young, labor faking, the inevitability of the twenty four-hour work week, the hemorrhage of twentieth-century wars, the challenge of declining hope, the chance for rebirth as the fossil fuel age dies, nineteenth-century optimism versus twentieth-century faithlessness, thin versus thick books, and the need for big corporations to adopt rundown cities and to compete in making them shine.

Some examples from his latest gallimaufry: "We can learn more from the present than from all history.... There should be a new type of historian who will mine the present for clues about the past." "In human affairs a straight line is the shortest distance to disaster." "There is a homesickness for the Middle Ages in typical intellectuals." "Truth is to be found not in absolutes but in nuances." Einstein sought "to rethink God's thoughts." "The change that matters is the change of a society's maxims. The 1960s saw a slaughter of axioms."

"It is to their credit that the British know how to decline gracefully."

A new subject in this book is growing old. Hoffer watches himself growing old with the attentive interest of a researcher haunting a laboratory specimen. Old age, he states calmly, is not a rumor. Eight years after retiring from the waterfront he continues to dream about loading and unloading ships. "One might maintain that a pension is pay for the work we keep on doing in our dreams after we retire."

Reading Hoffer has always been an astringent exposure like a roll in snow or mental pushups. "I no longer want to bark," Hoffer insists, "but I hang on to my prejudices. They are the testicles of my mind." Hoffer's prejudices come in many forms. "Marx never did a day's work in his life, and knew as much about the proletariat as I do about chorus girls." Children given a "permissive unbringing" are "putty in the hands of any two-bit manipulator." "It is blasphemous that a quadrupling of the price of oil by a bunch of crummy sheiks would drain the Occident of its dynamism." Many readers will continue to dislike some of what Hoffer says but relish the way he says it. Now Hoffer questions his present and future powers. "All I can do now is wring a few drops of essence from a shrunken mind," he complains without bitterness. But essence was ever the Hoffer specialty, and *Before the Sabbath* proves that his mind still contains remarkable stretch. 

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Briefly Noted

Pacifism in Japan: The Christian and Socialist Tradition

*edited by Novuya Bamba
and John F. Howes*

(University of British Columbia Press;
xiv + 300 pp.; \$9.50)

Americans are likely to think of the Japanese as fierce warriors who were only tamed by the horrors of the atomic ending of World War II. These essays make clear that in fact there has long been a substantial pacifist tradition in Japan, largely based in the socialist and Christian communities. Japan's constitutional renunciation of war since 1947 must therefore be seen not simply as an imposition by circumstance and U.S. occupation. It has a creditable place in two centuries of Japanese history.

The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked

*by Leslie H. Gelb
with Richard K. Betts*

(Brookings Institution; 387 pp.;
\$14.95)

An intriguing study. The central thesis is that Vietnam was not an instance of bumbling bureaucrats and myopic politicians sliding into disaster. To the contrary, say Gelb and Betts, the "system" worked quite well to sustain a foreign policy decision for twenty-five years, until May of 1975. That decision was that South Vietnam should not fall to the Communists, and the authors contend that the problem was not with the "system" but with the policy to which the system was harnessed. In drawing the obligatory "lessons" from Vietnam, they contend that the U.S. needs fewer "doctrines" and grand foreign policy designs. What is required is a more reflective pragmatism, combined with new mechanisms of "extrication" when mistakes are recognized.

In Defense of the Corporation *by Robert Hessen*

(Hoover Institution; 133 pp.; \$7.95)

An effective polemic against theorists (e.g., Adolf Berle) and activists (e.g., Ralph Nader) who contend the corporation violates the conditions of a free society. A problem with the argument is that Nader, for instance, has never worked out a comprehensive statement of his proposal that corporations should be federally chartered, and therefore opponents such as Hessen must operate largely by inference. Nonetheless, this nontechnical essay deserves attention both from reformers who assume the corporation is the enemy of social progress and from corporate managers who deep in their hearts suspect the reformers might be right.

Nuclear Arms in the Third World: U.S. Policy Dilemma *by Ernest W. Lefever*

(Brookings Institution; xii + 154 pp.;
\$9.95/3.95)

A brief overview of the current situation and "guesstimates" about the next ten years. The "dilemma" in the subtitle does not come through very clearly, since Mr. Lefever basically supports continued U.S. nuclear aid to allies and "friendlies." His expectations for the future assume that the USSR will not place parts of its nuclear arsenal outside its own territory.

Dialogues on American Politics

*by Irving Louis Horowitz
and Seymour Martin Lipset*

(Oxford University Press; 199 pp.;
\$2.95 [paper])

Two prominent political sociologists who are also friends exchange views on American government and society, with specific reference to party politics, voting habits, and the loss of civic virtue.

**John F. Kennedy:
Catholic and Humanist**
by Albert J. Menendez
(Prometheus; 144 pp.; \$12.95)

An admiring effort to depict JFK as a religiously serious and reflective Catholic who made a major contribution to shaping American politics and morality. The argument for JFK's piety is, however, excessively dependent upon the testimony of his mother and his friend Cardinal Cushing. More valuable contributions of this short book are a concise overview of anti-Catholicism in American history and an appendix containing the texts of various JFK statements on religion and morality.

**Patriot or Traitor:
The Case of General
Mihailovich**

(Hoover Institution; 497 pp.; \$19.00)

Mihailovich was a Yugoslav guerrilla leader against Nazism. Opposed by Tito's Communists, he was condemned as a traitor after the war. David Martin, who writes an introductory essay to this record of documentation that was not admitted at the trial, was instrumental in forming an American committee on Mihailovich's behalf. Of course all this is now an historical footnote, but it is an important footnote.

**An Historian's Approach
to Religion**
by Arnold Toynbee

(Oxford University Press; xiii + 340 pp.; \$17.50)

The second edition of a much respected work, with a new section, "Gropings in the Dark," in which Toynbee offers some of the tentative conclusions about the Ultimate Spiritual Reality that he had reached by 1974, the last year of his life. In its encyclopedic breadth and speculative reach it is a book best described as Toynbee-esque.

**Yesterday, Today,
and What Next?**
by Roland H. Bainton
(Augsburg; 144 pp.; \$3.95 [paper])

A humane historian of church history at Yale for forty-two years reflects humanely upon "the meaning of it all." Bainton has made significant contributions to the cause of Christian pacifism and these memoirs reflect his abiding interest in nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts in history.

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Correspondence (from p. 2)

useful to know that China's grain production is about 300 kg per capita per year. It has been about constant at that level, and is about 40 per cent or more higher than that in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Available per capita animal protein, while very low, is double that of India. Vegetables, fruits, animal protein, fish, etc. probably have been increasing faster than grain. Such produce, of course, is highly vulnerable to ultra leftist policies, the precise extent of which can not be gauged. Current policy is stressing diversification into such products.

In some of their examples to show

urban-rural differences the Londons probably have mistranslated their Chinese sources. In Tung County (*People's Daily*, December 20, 1978) wages probably are not \$7 JMP per month (i.e., one-seventh factory wages). Rather, *per capita distributions* to "commune members" from collective sources average \$7 JMP per month. There is a bit of ambiguity as to whether "commune member" implies each and every person, including young and old, male and female, or each adult laborer. My own judgment, shared by Chinese colleagues from both Taiwan and the Mainland, is that the reference is to everyone. This is the way per capita income has been computed in the past in China... Inasmuch as the county has a population of 500,000 but a labor force of 180,000, a laborer's wages are about three times per capita income, i.e., about \$21 JMP. (Wages are low there because of high investments in agricultural mechanization.) These wages are for income from collective sources. We do not know how much income comes from private sales of garden produce. It might be very high in this region situated conveniently to rich Peking markets. Moreover, this county is largely mechanized (\$70 million JMP were spent), so farmers may have a lot of time available for their gardens. The rural income may be lower than urban, but probably in this case the difference in living standard is far less than the Londons report.

Likewise, the Londons probably misinterpret the reports on China's very poor regions of the erosion-prone Northwest (*People's Daily*, November 26, 1978). The report was that in 69 out of 123 counties, per capita collective *income* (not *wages*) was under \$50 JMP per year. (Here there is less ambiguity. The Chinese says every person's average income, and does not refer ambiguously to "commune member.") Wages would be about triple the per capita income. Private income might supplement this.

I hope the Londons will exhibit the same care which they rightfully demand of others in interpreting particles of data about a massive country.

Benedict Stavis

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