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Retort Special Anthology Issue, 1942-1951

Holley Cantine

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may hold for their beliefs. Only in person to person relationships can true solidarity be built, and without solidarity the most perfect economic structure can do little to promote the well-being of mankind.

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social distinctions are based on wealth. This is especially true in a bureaucratic setup, where there is likely to be bitter rivalry among jobholders, and a mad scramble for advancement in the hierarchy, whether or not there is a salary differential. Fraternal feeling and ethical behavior do not thrive in such an atmosphere.

...We must recognize that man can survive without feeling solidarity with his fellows, but he can do so only as a frustrated and anxiety-ridden brute. It is only through fostering an attitude of brotherhood that a social system which affords real emotional and social security can be made possible.

The radical movement, as it is now constituted, leaves much to be desired in its understanding of the principle of human brotherhood and in its ability to apply it. It has been primarily preoccupied with problems of gaining power, and has tended to regard solidarity as an incidental byproduct of a successful revolution. Moreover, since it has always been composed to a great extent of individuals who turned to radicalism because they were frustrated and maladjusted, and whose personalities were therefore badly warped, megalomania and factional strife have played a large part in its activities. While giving lip-service to solidarity, such radicals devote most of their time and energy to battling among themselves for petty advantages, or scoring inconsequential theoretical points in endless squabbles.

Until we can come to realize that human well-being is not going to spring fully formed from an economic reorganization of society, but must be carefully nurtured, on a basis of personal sympathy and understanding, our efforts will, in all likelihood, result in a worse society than the present one. The dignity of man and psychological security have been all but destroyed by the social institutions of modern society, and must be largely reconstructed from the ground up. This is an extremely difficult task in a society whose every emphasis is directed at dividing man from his fellows, and one which can only be undertaken by those who really feel that all human beings are brothers, regardless of the contempt they

III.

If we define ethical behavior as that behavior which promotes the security—both physical and psychological—of one's fellows, it becomes obvious that the form of the economy is of fundamental importance in influencing moral attitudes. A highly competitive economic system, which places a premium on success at the expense of others can hardly be expected to contribute to such security, while a cooperative economy lends itself naturally to human brotherhood. This does not mean, however, that the form of the economy determines the moral standards of a culture. Human motivation is far more complex than that. The economic forms may themselves be profoundly altered by cultural attitudes and religious beliefs.

...While economic individualism seems to be a more probable basis for social conflict, and a consequent weak development of ethical standards of behavior, it is not impossible for a society to be economically cooperative, yet socially stratified and competitive. The Maori of New Zealand were virtually communists in the economic sense; everyone sharing equally in the food supply and each contributing their share of labor. However, the society was rigidly stratified politically, owing to the fact that one's social status was determined by one's order of birth. The eldest son was of higher rank...

It would thus appear that the form of the economy is not in itself an adequate basis for determining the moral standards of a society. Social stratification and conflict can exist without being caused by economic factors. While it would be futile to expect a moral renovation of modern society without profound economic reorientation, since the highly competitive economy of capitalism is in direct conflict with an attitude of human brotherhood, an economic change alone would be insufficient. A society which is stratified on the basis of prestige or ability can be just as competitive and have as little feeling of solidarity and emotional security, as one in which

1. Editorial by Holley R. Cantine, Jr.

Retort, A quarterly journal of Anarchism, art and reviews, Spring, 1945

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In a purely negative sense, anarchism today probably has more adherents than any other school of thought. Never before in history has the State revealed itself more nakedly as an organ of repression and exploitation; never before have political corruption and incompetence been so widely known and accepted as inevitable. The working structure of society is speedily disintegrating, and in the process the validity of the insights of early anarchist thinkers like Proudhon and Bakunin is being demonstrated with a clarity for which they could scarcely have dared to hope.

Ironically, however, despite this widespread and growing awareness of the essential accuracy of anarchist theory (not, of course, based on any knowledge of that theory, but simply on unavoidable empirical evidence) there has been no significant growth of an organized anarchist movement which might give it direction and dedication. Organized anarchism, though it has grown somewhat in recent years, is still a feeble minority movement, probably with no more adherents, and very possibly with fewer than it possessed fifty years ago. How can one account for this extraordinary discrepancy? While it is clearly too much to expect that an anarchist movement would rise overnight to a position of dominance in political life, it would surely seem probable, in view of the obviously very widespread mistrust of governments and politicians in the world today, that such a movement should be increasing its numbers and influence fairly rapidly. However, this is not occurring to any observable extent.

The principal reason for this phenomenon is undoubtedly the fact that most of the people who have become disillusioned in pol-

itics have been so benumbed by the very forces that have disillusioned them that they have entirely ceased thinking in terms of social action. The State has not only revealed itself as a force as malevolent and maleficent as the most hysterical anarchist had ever described it, but it has, at the same time, revealed its enormous power for destroying opposition and crushing the dissident individual. The knowledge that the State is a monster bent on destroying all humane values, has, for the most part, been derived from the fact that the State, in several countries—notably Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia—has proceeded to act this way with terrifying brutality and ferocity. The natural reaction to such a discovery has been to be paralyzed by terror rather than to calmly seek methods of organizing resistance. Even in those countries, like the United States, where the State has not yet achieved its full stature as an anti-human force, most of the people who have been shown its essential nature and foresee its probable future development have been too disquieted by the knowledge to do anything but look for a place to hide. The very suddenness of the revelation has been so stunning that resistance has appeared futile and action towards an alternative form of social organization hopeless.

Nevertheless, bad as the objective evidence of the depravity and power of the State has been, many individuals are either too optimistic or too courageous to be made completely hopeless by recognizing it. And the responsibility for the failure of the anarchist movement to gain strength from these elements rests to a large extent with that movement itself. Granted it was not prepared for the situation. Its numbers depleted in the '20s and early '30s by the apparently overwhelming success of the Bolshevik Revolution, it had few experienced propagandists or theorists left. (In this country at least, one rarely encounters a middle-aged anarchist who has been in the movement for long; they are nearly all over 60 or well under 40. Virtually an entire generation dropped out of the movement between 1918 and 1936 or 7.) Moreover, those who had remained in the seemingly doomed movement did so primarily out of sentiment-

what looks like a tangible result in order to satisfy his client, they do not have to offer any proof that the souls of the saved really go to heaven.

Theological codes of behavior do not distinguish between offenses of a strictly moral nature—that is: those which have an effect on human relations, like murder and theft—and sins which are purely ritualistic—like neglecting to observe a sacred ceremony or eating a forbidden food. Indeed, such a distinction would be impossible for them to make. Sins may be differentiated according to the degree of their seriousness, but since they all represent violations of commandments which are believed to be of divine origin, there is no basis for differentiating them qualitatively. This has frequently resulted in a conception of morality which is actually detrimental to social harmony. The ritual requirements of many religions run counter to the psychological needs of the individual, and therefore their enforcement causes emotional instability. The Calvinist prohibitions of drinking, dancing and sexual freedom lead naturally to the compensatory reactions of bigotry and fanaticism, which have had disastrous social consequences, as during the Salem witch trials, and the Prohibition experiment. The arbitrary asceticism of Roman Catholicism and Mohammedanism has likewise produced great social strife, in the form of Holy Wars and Inquisitions. The religious intuition is an extremely unreliable means of acquiring knowledge of what is best for humanity. The subconscious mind of the typical prophet is badly warped by frustration, and his 'revelations' usually intensify the maladjustment out of which they grew. The occasional brilliant insights of certain religious leaders should not blind us to the fact that most religious beliefs have been injurious to human well-being, and that there is no method whereby a sincere believer can distinguish the good from the bad.

as the carpentry techniques. Similar examples could be cited from all parts of the world...Whenever life is difficult or dangerous it is a great source of comfort to be able to convince oneself that all problems can be solved by a simple act of magic.

The amorality of such a conception is obvious enough. All that is necessary to establish rapport with the universe is knowledge of the proper rituals—a sort of technological knowledge which can be manipulated by anyone. What is perhaps not quite so obvious is that those religions which have acquired a moral content have not really altered the basic magical approach. For ritual they have substituted standards of behavior—the idea of sin—but the underlying principle remains the same. A believer in a theological moral code is good, according to doctrine, because by being good he is fulfilling the will of god, and thereby avoiding divine retribution, just as the Pawnee is averting crop failure with his magic stone. Both are manipulating nature to achieve a desired end, the only difference being that the moral religionist is manipulating his own nature. If he can find some way of appeasing the supernatural which does not require moral behavior—and virtually all theological codes provide such loopholes—he need not have the least compunction about disregarding ethical commandments. Since the only reason for moral behavior is to please the deity, one is not violating his religious responsibilities by breaking the moral law, if he can do so without incurring god's displeasure. Thus, nearly all of the Christian churches sanction war, despite the specific prohibition of killing in their doctrine. This apparent violation of principle has been justified by a subtle process of interpreting scripture—a process at which the theological mind is peculiarly adept—in such a way as to 'prove' that the moral law may be set aside if certain ritual precautions are taken. In such cases the church fills a role similar to that of the primitive sorcerer who, because of his superior training or ability, is supposed to be able to obtain better results from the spirits than a mere layman. The Christian churches have one great advantage over the sorcerer, however. While he has to accomplish

tality, and their main contribution to the current period has been a stubborn unwillingness to relinquish any vestige of the old ideas, thereby creating an atmosphere of sectarianism which has had a very discouraging effect on new converts.

Another factor is not at all unimportant in my opinion, not only as a reason why anarchism fails to grow today, but also why it has never, except in the somewhat diluted form of syndicalism, succeeded in attracting a wide following in the past. Anarchism, since its inception, has been primarily a movement of social criticism and protest. In this it has not differed conspicuously from other radical tendencies, except for one important particular. Most other forms of radicalism expect to achieve their objective by taking over the State, either through the vote or by insurrection, and in their preparations for this task they have been able to provide a great deal of APPARENTLY PURPOSEFUL concrete activity for their followers. Anarchism, on the other hand, since it visualizes a COMPLETELY NEW form of society, cannot consistently engage in the type of short-term activities that provide the main outlet for the energies of the followers of more conventional radical groups. Political rallies, electioneering, nominating conventions— all the thrills and activity of a political campaign—are manifestly impossible for a movement whose central assumption is that political action is both futile and dangerous. But young people, especially those who have just begun to suspect that the status quo is fundamentally rotten, have lots of physical energy and a burning need for action, which can be satisfied, at least temporarily, by the many activities that a political party—even a small, powerless one—requires during election campaigns. The lack of an equivalent in anarchist activity has been a potent liability to the movement.

The syndicalist wing of anarchism has been able, in certain periods and various places—notably Spain, to provide an adequate substitute for such activity: organizing the unorganized workers in unions, agitating strikes, etc. Today, in the United States, however, this outlet is nothing like what it was when the IWW was in

its heyday 30 or 40 years ago. Most of the workers are already 'organized' and the task of the anarcho-syndicalist is no longer that of going into comparatively virgin territory to propagate the idea of workers' solidarity, perhaps at the risk of his life. Rather, it is the much more discouraging and demoralizing job of persuading the workers that their present unions are no good and that they should form new ones. While many workers know all too well that the existing unions are entirely incapable of satisfying their real needs and demands, they are too disillusioned and apathetic to be much impressed by the idea that new unions could improve conditions.

It seems to me that the anarchist movement should pay more attention to this problem than they have done in the past. The early anarchist thinkers for the most part tended to assume that once the workers became aware of the true nature of the State, they would act spontaneously to overthrow it and set up a new society.

This assumption has now been completely refuted by events. Without a concrete program of action, the workers simply lapse into apathy and resignation, however much they may be convinced of the evils of the existing society.

Since it is clearly ridiculous for a movement whose primary belief is that all government is useless and dangerous to engage in specifically political activity, the anarchists will have to develop a non-political program, probably centered around various work-projects in which anarchist principles of living and working are put into practice to the extent that conditions permit. The transition to a free society is going to be much more difficult than the old anarchists imagined; the principles of mutual aid, free association and equality will have to be worked out much more concretely than they are today, if they are to win wide acceptance. They can best be implemented by actual experiments—workshops, farm communes, cooperative houses, etc.—which consciously set out to put these principles in practice and to discover which forms of organization and individual behavior are required for their achievement. While the present emphasis on theoretical discussion and campaigns of

clusive preoccupation with original sin. The economic system is itself subject to great modification by psychological factors, and the conduct of revolutionist before achieving power is bound to influence the sort of society they will establish. Unless serious attention is given to problems of fundamental morality, there is no reason to believe that an economic revolution would lead to anything more desirable than Germany or Russia have achieved. This does not mean, however, that the radical movement has need of a theological approach. Ethics and religion are far from inseparable; in fact, they have always been rather uncomfortable bedfellows. A truly revolutionary ethics, based on a scientific understanding of man's nature and needs is what is called for.

II.

The connection between religion, in the sense of belief in the supernatural, and morality, seems to have been the result of a largely fortuitous historical development, and the combination has never been a stable one. Supernaturalism in its simplest and most basic form—the belief in magic—contains no conception of good and evil, but is essentially a technique for controlling nature by means of ritual acts. This belief appears to arise spontaneously as a psychological response to frustration, and can be observed in small children who have been given no theological training. One somehow 'knows' that he will get what he wants if he will only hold his breath for a certain length of time, or avoid stepping on the cracks in the sidewalk.

This form of religion is very widespread among primitive peoples. A Pawnee farmer, for instance, will plant a curiously shaped stone in his garden, in the belief that it will insure a good crop. If it doesn't work, he will try a different stone, but not forsake the principle. Throughout Polynesia, the construction of large war canoes and public buildings is attended by elaborate ceremonies, which are considered to be as essential to the success of the enterprise

This theological explanation of the cause and cure of catastrophe is, of course, grossly inaccurate. Since they are unable to account for human motivation except in terms of fear of divine retribution, the theologians completely fail to recognize the economic and social factors involved in the development of society. To them all the evils of today are directly traceable to those philosophers who supposedly turned man away from god, and at most they are willing to concede that the church was partly to blame: it did not combat its own internal abuses with sufficient vigor, thereby providing the opposition with valuable ammunition. Thus, their solution is hopelessly naive: man has only to renounce his disbelief, and restore the church to its "rightful" place in society, and harmony and security will soon be established. For their part they promise to set their house in order and purge themselves of the worldliness which has brought them into disrepute, but few of them are capable of going beyond that.

Nevertheless, despite their confusion of cause and effect and their lack of understanding of the complexity of human motivation, some of these religious thinkers have a clearer grasp of the nature of the situation than do the more orthodox radicals. Being under no compulsion to interpret society in purely economic terms, they have been able to focus their attention on the degeneration of human relations and the relaxation of morality. While they are certainly wrong in believing that the church could bring about a revival of moral behavior, they are right in pointing out the need for such behavior. The radicals, on the other hand, are apparently incapable of profiting from the mistakes and failures of the past and continue to believe that morality is simply a byproduct of the economic system. For them, therefore, the only problem to solve is one of economic reorganization.

...There is no denying that economic factors play an extremely important part in social development, but to interpret them as the sole determinant of human motivation leads to conclusions which are almost as inaccurate as those of the theologians, with the ex-

resistance to specific evils like conscription cannot be neglected, the movement needs additional activities to provide it with a more positive and constructive program.

It may be objected that the sort of people who need action in order to remain in the movement would be of no ultimate value to anarchism. I feel that this is a great mistake. Anarchism, which aspires to become a way of life for all mankind, cannot base itself today, in its infancy, on the concept that it is only for a chosen few. Unless it can find ways of reaching and attracting adherents on a mass scale, it can never be more than a sect. I do not mean to suggest that we should alter or debase our principles and theories to make them more acceptable to the 'average man', as many of the political radicals have done. But surely anarchism is rich enough in potentialities that it should be reaching many more people than it is at present. Moreover, since anarchism is a philosophy which embraces all human activity, it is being badly served by a movement which confines itself to only a few small areas of human behavior.

Further discussion and suggestions on this question are invited.
H.C.

2. Resistance in Prison by Clif Bennet

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NOTE: The following article is from our forthcoming Prison Anthology.

For those who want a preview of the American police state in action, complete with distinguishing variations from the European model, thirty-two Federal correctional and penal institutions offer unlimited research facilities. Entrance requirements are stiff, but

the experience may prove invaluable to anyone looking for a sling-shot to use against the new Goliath.

Organizing resistance within a prison requires an understanding of the inmate's state of mind. He cannot exercise initiative or choice, nor may he express himself freely in any way. His individuality is limited to making "Big Deal" talk with other cons about how many Packards and Billy Rose blondes wait for him outside the walls. With his ego thoroughly squashed and trampled on, he is further cramped emotionally by the prohibition against showing sympathy or solidarity with a mistreated fellow inmate. "Every man does his own time," is the iron sophistry of the walled city. The uniforms are there to see that you keep your eyes straight ahead while the man next to you is slugged and dragged down the corridor to the strip cell.

Thus starved for an opportunity to affirm their humanity, prisoners fall back heavily on the old American substitutes for honest emotion: Patriotism and Mama. The Federal prisons had one of the highest records in the country for War Bond sales. No cell is complete without a picture of Mama, and no issue of the prison paper escapes some maudlin Edgar Guest intent on explaining the particular virtues of his maternal parent.

The springboard for action which will restore some semblance of Man to the numbered fragments inside the wall is always some immediate grievance felt by the prison body as a whole or by some sizable group within it. Usually it is the prison food, which appears on the menu board in the mess hall under a variety of alluring names—and always turns out to be lumpy bread pudding.

Food strikes may be directed against the entire meal, with the men refusing to leave their quarters where possible, or marching through the mess hall with empty trays if attendance there is compelled. Where the action is directed against a specific item of food, inmates are wised up by the grapevine ahead of chow time, and take everything but the objectionable food. As a variation of the food boycott directed against one item, the scrapple, rotten frank-

tions. Similarly, those socialists who uphold the rulers of the Russian State are conservatives rather than radicals, since they seldom advocate anything but the retention of the status quo in Russia.

9. Towards a Revolutionary Morality by H. R. Cantine Jr.

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I.

The profound deterioration of civilized standards of conduct during recent years has brought about a great deal of discussion concerning the role of ethical criteria in social thinking. This discussion has been endlessly confused by the assumption that moral standards are the exclusive province of theological religion, an assumption made by both the religionist and their more orthodox radical opponents.

The religious leaders of nearly all sects are agreed that the primary cause of the world crisis is loss of faith. They accuse the philosophers of materialism and rationalism of being the true originators of totalitarianism. Man, they insist, is weak and sinful. Without the restraining influence of the fear of god, he invariably lets his baser nature get out of control, with fatal consequences for civilized values. Conveniently overlooking the state of society when the church was dominant, they assert that the only hope for democracy, or indeed for civilization itself, lies in a return to the religious beliefs of our fathers.

the revolutionary armies started out very democratic, but had become thoroughly autocratic before the war was over.

It will be objected that without the use of armed force, the overthrow of the existing system would be impossible. I do not believe that this is true. It is quite possible that a revolutionary minority would be unable to establish itself in control of the state without making use of military methods, but since a maneuver of this sort has nothing to do with a genuine classless society, it is beside the point. A truly free and equal social system can only be realized when a substantial majority of the working population are consciously in favor of it, and in this case, such techniques of struggle as the strike, the boycott, sabotage and civil disobedience should be perfectly adequate to shake loose the ruling class.

Note

The words 'socialist' and 'radical' are frequently used as though they were synonyms. I do not believe that this is altogether accurate, if we accord to the words their common meanings, and do not try to fit the definitions to our own ideas. A socialist, broadly speaking, is anyone who advocates common ownership of the means of production (although there is considerable disagreement among socialists of different schools, as to which social unit should be vested with ownership: opinion on this question ranges all the way from the village community to the Total State.) A radical is simply one who believes that fundamental changes in the social system are necessary. At the present time I think it is quite safe to say that nearly all radicals are socialists of one sort or another, but many socialists are not, and indeed never have been, radicals. Those socialists who believe that socialism can be achieved legally, by electing a majority in the legislative branch of the government, and then passing constitutional amendments legislating socialism into being, are not radicals but liberals. They do not advocate fundamental social change, but a New Deal within the framework of existing institu-

tutions or greasy potatoes may be taken, hidden in a scrap of paper, or paper napkin, and dropped to the walk upon leaving the mess hall. It is unlikely to reappear on the tables, particularly after the Associate Warden had to wade through it to Officers' Mess.

Since refusal to eat cannot be ferreted out as an assault on the prison administration, it is a good initial move prior to a strike. In both the minimum and maximum custody institutions, we found that a food boycott, once popular, tended naturally to become a work strike. Once the prisoners had refused a meal, they gathered in little groups in the yard. "No eat, no work," they said. And the hardier souls among them would refuse to report to their work detail.

The extreme form of the food boycott is the hunger strike. When a large number of men take this action, it cannot be expected to last more than a day or two at the longest. The hunger strike is better adapted to the use of individuals or small, highly dedicated groups with a long-range view of what is to be accomplished.

In any action taken by the prison population as a group, the initiators must be familiar with the routine steps to put down resistance, and the working rules for relations with the prison authorities during times of unrest. The prison officials will use:

(1) Soft soap. The confidence man on the prison staff, usually the Warden or an Associate Warden, will try to have the strikers herded into the auditorium and, with the prescribed combination of sternness and paternal concern, will promise them the moon if they get back into harness.

(2) Intimidation. This may be directed against the group as a whole, or individuals suspected as troublemakers may be weeded out and brought to the Warden's Office for a reprimand and warning. Solitary confinement, loss of 'good time', and shipment to a tougher pen are the usual threats.

(3) Violence. Pick handles are a favorite weapon. Water hoses are sometimes used; if one of these is brought into a cell block prison etiquette demands that you use mattresses and blankets for shelter

so the officers may destroy prison property without your wasting energy on the job. Tear gas and guns are brought out only in extreme situations; the American prison guard does not as a rule develop a great deal of personal animosity even in critical moments. His attitude is "That's the regulations." He would undoubtedly lock up his own father with the same impersonal loyalty to the Officers' Manual.

To meet the inevitable soft soap, the strikers must have a clear idea of their objective. They must have a definite demand, or set of demands, which it is possible for the administration to meet. They must agree before striking that they will not return to work until these demands are granted or the strike is broken by force. They must present these demands at the first chance.

To insure the continuation of the strike after the spokesmen are sent to solitary or shipped (usually in the middle of the night, or while the population is locked in cell blocks) a succession of leadership should be agreed on, with alternate contacts in each cell block.

When violence is used by the officials, passive resistance is most effective in prison. It is sometimes difficult to adhere to, but will result in increased sympathy from those not striking and will conserve the rebellious spirit of the men for future action. An excess of violence on the part of the inmates, even in self-defense, will exhaust their ardor and postpone a resurgence for a long time. As in guerrilla warfare, the objective is not the individual enemy, but his materials, means of communication and morale.

Leadership must be alert to all local developments of value to the strikers. In the Danbury prison strike of 1946 the administration was aware of plans for a strike because of news releases sent out by coordinating groups in the 'free world'. A fake demonstration was held in the prison yard on the day before the strike was scheduled in the hope that prison officials might think that was the limit of the disturbance. The following day was Lincoln's Birthday and the strike might have been a dismal failure had not the officials

must be rejected because they are fundamentally out of harmony with the psychological basis of equality and freedom.

The taking of human life, as Tolstoy has pointed out, is not an activity in which the average individual engages voluntarily and in cold blood. The average man can be made into an efficient and ruthless killer, but first he must undergo a rigorous period of preparation, to deaden his moral sensibilities and his sense of responsibility. Except in comparatively rare instances, men are only able to take human life when they are acting under orders from some higher authority which sanctions the killing and absolves them of all personal responsibility for the act. It does not matter particularly whether this authority is an imperialist state, the Church Militant, or a revolutionary party—in each case it is the organization that bears the responsibility and not the individual. From the standpoint of social equality and freedom, the dangers inherent in this situation should be obvious. Once an individual has been trained, or come to accept the principle that he is not personally responsible for what he does, his ability to act independently, as a member of a free, self-governing community is necessarily impaired. It is well known that ex-soldiers do not make good democrats; that their tendency is to follow a leader, blindly and unquestioningly. It is frequently argued that this could be remedied, in a revolutionary army, by giving greater individual responsibility to the soldiers, choosing officers by popular vote, etc. This reasoning seems to me to be based on a fundamental misconception of the nature of militarism: it is not authoritarian simply because it has an undemocratic heritage, which could be destroyed by changing the leadership and making certain structural changes in the army, but because the natural tendency of the average soldier, consciously or unconsciously, is to evade moral responsibility for his actions by transferring it to his superiors. Let us not forget that Napoleon started his career as an officer in a revolutionary army, and that he achieved his power to a great extent because of the support of his troops. Likewise, in both the Russian and the Spanish Civil Wars,

proper state of mind, or they believed that the new society would spring into being spontaneously once the old order had been destroyed. In neither case did it matter especially what means were employed, and since military methods promised to achieve results more quickly than any other, they were widely favored. This was given a certain plausibility at the time, moreover, by the fact that the art of war was still in a relatively primitive stage of development, and a poorly equipped army of revolutionists might very well be a match for the forces that could be mustered by the existing government.

Today the situation is greatly altered. While an irregular army of revolutionists stood some chance of defeating a regular army equipped with single-shot rifles and muzzle-loading cannons, it is no match for tanks, dive-bombers and modern siege artillery, as events in Spain, and more recently in Poland and Greece have demonstrated. But what is infinitely more important is the fact that military methods have been discovered to be utterly incompatible with the attainment of a really free and equal society. It is now recognized by radicals who have given serious consideration to the matter that such a society cannot be imposed by a benevolent minority, nor will it arise spontaneously upon the destruction of the status quo. The Russian Revolution has exploded both of these hypotheses. Serious radicals have come to realize that the means employed to bring about socialism have a very important influence on the kind of socialism achieved, and that to prepare for a society of freedom and equality, it is necessary to build up the sort of organization, and to foster the attitudes and behavior, which will promote these values. Therefore, aside from purely humanitarian considerations—and these also are very important in a movement dedicated to brotherhood and human dignity (it is one of the worst inconsistencies of a large section of contemporary radicalism that, while it professes to be working for the good of all mankind, it dismisses any concern for the victims of bloodshed as "sentimentality")—military methods of achieving the new society

obligingly ordered all men to report to their work assignments on the morning of that day.

Danbury prison at that time held a large number of Negro Selective Service cases, most of whom worked in the prison industry, a glove factory. The initial agitation was therefore directed at the Negro cell block, with the result that the prison industry was closed down, half the population demonstrated and sang songs in the yard, and two or three hundred refused to be enticed into the mess hall by a chicken dinner.

At the same prison, the inmate paper was edited by a company man who diffused more than the ordinary smell of polecat. When he put out an issue urging acceptance of the officials' plan for an Inmate Advisory Council (company union), all available copies were gathered up in every cell block, tied together in a bundle and delivered to the Warden without comment.

In the Lewisburg strike of 1947, the administration put forward this company union proposal right in the middle of the fireworks. Slips of paper were distributed to every cell, so the inmate might indicate his choice of representatives for the projected pint-sized parliament. The sewage disposal system was jammed with paper slips for several hours.

Whether the political prisoners are segregated or mixed with the messages thrown from the window to other inmates. One of our inventive geniuses took a couple of pieces of toilet tissue, smeared them liberally with stale mustard, wrapped them in another piece of tissue, and tossed them out. The uniform fell for it and elbowed a couple of inmates out of the way in his dash to pick up the "secret message". He got it, all right, and looked mighty silly glancing from his smeared hands to our window.

If you have a lot of time on your hands, an illegal newspaper can be published and distributed with the most primitive equipment. A tin can, milk bottle, or shaped piece of wood, or the sole of a shoe will form a simple mimeograph machine. A piece of blanket will make a mimeograph pad. You can cement it to the tin can etc.

with a highly efficient glue made of oatmeal strained through a sock. Stencils and ink may be "borrowed" from the prison office by another inmate. If gelatin can be obtained from the prison kitchen, a duplicator can be made, using any flat container for the gelatin, and an indelible pencil for the master copy. If you can't get paper any other way, do what one of our boys in solitary did: wash the print off magazine pages.

As conditions get tighter, you may find yourself locked securely in individual cells. If there is a half inch of space under the door as there usually is, flat objects may be passed from one cell to another by making a thin rope of tied shoelaces or sheet strips with a weight at one end. This can be skidded across the corridor and under a door on the opposite side. Between floors the ventilating system may be used for talking. Useful things like checkers, chess pieces and so on may be fashioned from a papier mache made of shredded newspapers with oatmeal paste for binder. There are a hundred ways to maintain your morale, and on occasion, to lower that of your opponent. Once, when feeling particularly morose, I cheered myself up by converting three full-size sheets into a pair of rope-soled shoes, and fashioned a medicine ball out of fourteen sets of winter underwear and a laundry bag.

When there are only a tiny handful of resisters, the most dramatic actions are inadvisable.

They may be supplanted by cautious sabotage and the stupidity strike, plus slowdown wherever applicable. The plumbing, lighting and communication systems are vulnerable. Schweikism is the last resort of the individual resister. How much material he may damage in his well-meaning blundering is a matter for the prison bookkeeping system.

This matter of the bookkeeping system brings up the angle of getting the drop on an official by uncovering manipulations with the prison budget. In one Federal prison, it was found that a three-way split existed between the warehouse officer, meat dealer and front office. The meat ordered would total 400 pounds. The dealer

tend that peace would mean enduring bliss for the country, and the world. On the contrary, they could continue to emphasize that the existing government is incapable of making a just and lasting peace-as it cannot be trusted to maintain civil liberties. They would consequently present the goal of peace frankly as a stopgap, which would solve no fundamental problems, and which, in all probability, wouldn't last-unless the workers took further action. It might be objected that such a presentation would be too negative and colorless to have any appeal, but I believe that the average worker is sufficiently sophisticated to recognize that the advantages of not being shot at, and not being restricted and regimented in the hundred and one ways the war requires, are desirable in themselves, even though they do not represent Utopia.

IV.

Many of the radicals who oppose the present war are not against war as such, but only 'imperialist wars', that is, wars which are fought by capitalist or totalitarian states for profits, foreign markets and colonies. Radicals of this school of thought believe that wars fought for 'progressive' ends-notably civil wars-warrant their full support and participation. Today, they are enthusiastic champions of the irregular armies of Poland, Greece and France, and become furiously indignant if it is suggested that the American Civil War, the French Revolutionary Wars, the Spanish Civil War, or even the Russian Civil War did not benefit the cause of the oppressed.

This attitude has long seemed to me a romantic carryover from an earlier day when the full implications of radicalism had not yet been worked out. Most of the radicals of the nineteenth century did not believe that the achievement of a free and equal society would be a very difficult problem. They either assumed that such a society could be brought about by a radical minority which would seize control of the state, and then manipulate the masses into the

Contemporary radicals, however, are not really very much concerned with principles, and when pressed will usually defend their inactivity with arguments that are based on pure expediency. Since the working class, and particularly the organized workers, have accepted the war with great docility, the radicals contend that they cannot advocate anti-war activity, thereby running the risk of alienating their potential followers. Anyhow, they argue, the war is nearly over, and it is too late to do anything about it.

It is difficult to cope with arguments like this, not because they are valid, but because they represent such a thoroughly debased version of radicalism that it scarcely seems worth bothering with. These are not the arguments of people who are seriously working for a better world, but of cynical politicians who are only interested in power for themselves. Radicalism that is worthy of the name does not wait for the 'masses' to make the first move. If this had been the policy of radicals in the old days, it is impossible to imagine how the movement would have gotten started. The true radical is an agitator, who regards it as his function to combat apathy and hostility on the part of the workers; he does not go into hiding until they begin to act in a revolutionary manner, and then jump on the bandwagon.

The argument that it is too late to do anything about the war is also a byproduct of the modern radical's lack of initiative rather than honest conviction. It has been current now for at least two years, during which time something could surely have been done. Even today, although Europe has already been "liberated"—obliterated would be a better word—the armies have not yet been withdrawn, and the Asiatic war is still in progress.

A radical campaign for an immediate peace would resemble the liberal efforts in this direction only in its broad objective—just as in civil liberties cases, both radicals and liberals are attempting to free the victims. Radicals would not, as the liberal pacifists are inclined to do, present the demand for peace as if they were asking the government to correct an oversight, nor would they pre-

would deliver 300, but the warehouseman would receipt for the full amount shown on the bill and the front office would pay for it. The take went three ways.

In another prison, a 30' by 25' frame shop with a dirt floor cost \$3000 to build with free labor, while a chicken house of cinder block ran to \$10,000 with the same free labor. Six inches of sand was dumped on the floor, to be scraped up and thrown out the same year. Irregularities of this sort run through the whole Bureau of Prisons, and it is a rare guard or official who is not lining his pocket with cash or material covered by the jailhouse budget.

The waste which is a unique feature of American economy is sharply evident in prison. Often, food produced on the prison farm will be left on the ground to rot while the men inside the wall belch along on eternal beans and bread pudding. This occurs because prison bookkeeping systems demand that the food from the prison farm be charged against the kitchen at the market price. At Lewisburg Penitentiary, a large portion of the tomato crop rotted in 1946 because the market price of tomatoes happened to be too high to permit the cons to eat the food they had raised.

Prison is an unhappy parable of life in "outside" society!

3. There is No Social Contract! (Editorial) by Holley R. Cantine, Jr.

Retort, A quarterly journal of Anarchism, art and reviews, Winter, 1947

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There still appear to be liberals, who while they may be skeptical of the justice, power, or potential achievements of the U.N., fail to see the injustice, arbitrariness, and invariable failure of the single 'nation' or state.

Few are so naive as to suppose that the present peace show is anything more than a vehicle of power politics, which—if it has even that function—allocates the division, repression and rule over smaller 'nations'.

Yet when the power of any particular state, more particularly their own or some power they conceive to be representative of them—is called into question, they immediately hurl about 'lawfully delegated federation', 'just and equitable commonwealth'. They conceive of the 'state' as possessing powers that will prevent their house from being broken into and robbed.

Such liberals resent the charge that they consider man to be fundamentally evil. When one points out that even in terms derived from their own beliefs, the state could then be nothing more than a coercive instrument for protecting the majority of good men from the small number that is evil, they are not content.

The more sophisticated liberals, particularly those with academic philosophical training, pretend to believe that the powers of the state are delegated through a social contract by men that are neither good nor evil, but capable of both. It is, then, against the evil in all men, rather than evil men, that the state devolves its powers. But consider the blatant idiocy of the claim that the state is an agency for the prevention of the evil in man's nature from rising to ascendancy, (cf. Calvinism) when we can see that the organized evil of the state, perhaps more in contemporary times than ever before, has no match for setting loose the satanic furies that are supposed to lurk in men—that very state designed to protect the good in men.

The question we must ask these men, who in years of such transparent cynicism and despondency have 'evolved' in their thinking from Rousseau to Hobbes, is: if man is neither good nor evil, why is evil so much more powerful than good, that an ORGANIZATION of good—the state—is required to keep the evil in check? Furthermore, how do they reconcile their definition of the state as an organization of the good in man with its being a 'NECESSARY evil'.

pear as a rare exception, it tacitly implies that the rule is just and honorable.

The radical approach, on the other hand, makes no attempt to conceal the fact that the legal code is weighted in favor of the status quo, and that the victim is being persecuted for his views—not unexpectedly, through some slip-up in the law-enforcing machinery, but as a logical consequence of the whole emphasis of the code. The courts are not called upon, respectfully, to undo an error, but indicted as agents of the enemies of the working class. The radicals do not stop here, however; they set out to enlist as much popular support for the victim as possible, and use this support to put pressure on the government to release its victim. By organizing demonstrations, strikes, and similar public disturbances, they make it so uncomfortable for the government that finally it grudgingly yields. If and when the victim is released as the result of such pressure, no one can possibly conclude that the government has acted out of benevolence or a desire that an injustice be corrected; it has obviously been forced, by the action of the workers, and against its will, to make a concession. Thus, the system stands condemned as the enemy of the elementary rights of the workers, and at the same time the workers have been aroused to concrete, and to a degree, successful, action against it.

Since war, both from the standpoint of the working class as a whole, and the radical workers in particular, is a much greater menace than the mere imprisonment of an individual, it should follow that radicals would act in the most vigorous manner to bring it to an end. Not only are large numbers of workers being drafted into the army, thereby running a serious risk of being killed or wounded, but the right to strike, and civil liberties generally, are endangered in wartime as at no other time. Only the assumption that the war is in the interests of the oppressed—an assumption which no genuine radical could make concerning the present conflict—could provide a principled excuse for the radicals' failure to act.

new war in the near future. However, in my opinion, such considerations are largely irrelevant to the real question, and are raised only to confuse the issue and excuse the radicals for their inaction. A campaign to end the war can be either bourgeois liberal or radical depending on the methods it employs, and its attitude towards the existing government. By way of analogy, let us examine the way civil liberties cases are handled by radicals, as distinguished from liberals.

According to the logic of the anti-war, anti-peace radicals, if a member of a radical group is arrested and imprisoned for his activities, the group should conduct a campaign pointing out that the legal system of status quo is unjust and detrimental to the interests of the working class, but they should not, by any means, demand that the victim be released. Such a demand, according to This viewpoint, would be essentially bourgeois and counterrevolutionary inasmuch as (1) The release of the imprisoned radical would not destroy the system under which he was unjustly imprisoned and (2) It would help to create the fatal illusion that the government was a benevolent institution which could be depended upon to do the right thing for the workers in the long run. There may be some extreme sectarians who would argue in this manner, but I have never met up with any of them. In actual practice, radical groups, when confronted by a civil liberties case, make use of one or the other of two approaches.

The liberal approach, which is comparable with the liberal, write-your-congressman-to-end-the-war technique, consists of arguing that the arrest is unconstitutional; that there has been a miscarriage of justice which must be remedied. The fundamental integrity of the legal system is not questioned: on the contrary, the violation of the victim's civil rights is depicted as incomprehensible, and the possibility that the authorities might be acting with malice aforethought is ignored. Such a campaign can very easily play an essentially counter-revolutionary role. It buttresses the pretensions of the status quo in the act of opposition. By making the case ap-

Liberals will time and again give this schizoid definition of 'the state'.

In this connection they use society and the state interchangeably, arguing that if there were no state there would be no organized society; progressives continuing in this vein, feel that the increasing complexity and corruption are inherent and inevitable. The idea or possibility of establishing a society of simplicity and statelessness is consequently incomprehensible to them.

We must omit 'necessary' from the definition and substitute 'unmitigated'. The state is an unmitigated evil. Aside from the usual discernible reasons, there is a further one that must be recognized by radicals: that is, the irresponsibility—which if man may be said to have any inherent qualities—seems to be inherent in man. Man invariably and willingly relinquishes his individual duties to a group. It is not merely gullibility, which many of us have hitherto believed to be a dominant cause for the failure of revolutions such as the Russian; it is the unwillingness of individual men to assume responsibility for their own well being.

It does not appear likely that any satisfactory social change will occur until man has developed an ingrained mistrust of all forms of institutions and organizations, except perhaps small groups within which he functions with full responsibility and an equal share of control. We may no longer think in terms of social contract—power delegated by us to some mythical organization of the popular will. For while there is an organization of a small minority of people with power over us all, its power is not delegated; it is usurped. THERE IS NO SOCIAL CONTRACT!

4. Art: Play and its Perversions by Holley Cantine

Retort, A quarterly journal of Anarchism, art and reviews, Fall, 1947

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I.

Nearly all of the higher animals, especially when they are young, prefer to occupy themselves a good part of the time with activity that has no direct practical value. In all save man, this activity is of a purely physical nature—jumping, racing, frisking about, or pretending to fight with one another. Man, as a result of his more highly developed intellect, and the accumulated culture produced by it, has built up a complex range of play. In some of its forms, human play resembles that of the other animals to a large extent, but other forms have become so refined and altered that it is frequently difficult to recognize that they belong in the same category.

Probably the most widely misunderstood of the forms of human play are those fields of activity which are classified as the fine arts—music, poetry, painting and so forth. So much has been written attempting to prove that art possesses some 'higher' or at least functional significance, that it is only by observing the behavior of small children, who have not yet become fully conscious of their social role, and who spontaneously alternate singing, dancing and plastic art with the playful actions of other species, that one can see it in its proper perspective.

It is generally recognized that play is natural and necessary for small children, but it is widely held that it is somehow inappropriate and beneath the dignity of adults. In many societies, particularly those that are based on class or status stratification, adult play is actively discouraged. At a certain age, which varies somewhat depending on culture, class and historical period, but which roughly coincides with puberty, the individual's desire for play is rather abruptly subjected to a concerted campaign of ridicule and repression. He is now no longer a child and should cease to behave

so effective that they could never have been overthrown from below, it should follow that these same techniques, in the hands of the victorious rulers of Russia, and the other United Nations—who have had ample opportunity to learn everything the Nazis had to teach and have given no evidence that they would hesitate to apply it—would be equally effective, thus ending for good the possibility of a better world. Moreover, the war-radicals are not even capable of accepting the logic of their own 'lesser evil' theory. It has been perfectly obvious for more than a year that there was no longer any possible danger of the Nazis dominating the world, and that the real threat of world domination comes from the Big Three. Nonetheless, not a single war radical has yet remembered that his defection from radicalism was only supposed to last until the Nazi Peril had been eliminated.

III.

What radical opposition to the war exists is, for the most part, of a curiously abstract character. While opposing the war in theory and noisily proclaiming his ideological purity in this matter, the typical anti-war radical is horrified at the suggestion that he should actively resist the war. He does not hesitate to take a job in a munitions factory, or even go into the armed forces, and the proposal that he should advocate an immediate peace drives him to fury. He stigmatizes this position as bourgeois, on the grounds that only a social revolution can really destroy the roots of war, and that to advocate anything short of this betrays the working class by creating the illusion that the status quo can be trusted to further their interests.

It is quite true that many of the proponents of an immediate peace are heavily influenced by bourgeois liberal thinking, and are far from revolutionary in their approach and objectives. It is also true that ending the war, in itself, leaves unsolved the major problems of mankind, and does not guarantee that there will not be a

II.

Pro-war radicals (or rather ex-radicals, since it is absurd to consider anyone a radical * while he is supporting, however critically, the government-especially in wartime when it is at its most repressive and vicious) are a phenomenon which seems to occur in all wars, no matter how blatantly imperialistic they are. It is primarily a manifestation of emotional instability rather than a serious and principled position. Certain radicals, when confronted by the fact of war, tend to lose control of their emotions, and in spite of strong intellectual convictions, sometimes extending over many years, are swept into the patriotic camp. Usually, of course, they succeed in rationalizing this departure from principle, at least to their own satisfaction, and insist vehemently that they have not really changed their views, but the rationalizations are almost invariably a pathetic blend of retrospective falsification and an hysterical acceptance of premises which run counter not only to their own previous convictions, but to the whole philosophy of radicalism.

To expose the argument which the radical victims of war-psychosis put forward to justify their position is largely a waste of time, because they are not really prepared to argue the question. Their rationalizations are merely a face-saving device and have no causal connection with their actual state of mind. For example, most of the war-radicals of the Second World War took the position that the failure of independent working-class action to prevent the spread of Nazism had left them with no alternative but to support the lesser evil' of the United Nations, since the Nazis were so efficient at suppressing internal dissent that a German victory would destroy forever the possibility of struggling for a better social system. Once the danger of a Nazi-dominated world had been averted, they maintained, it would be safe for radicals to return to their traditional opposition to the status quo. This argument, if true, logically reduces the fundamental assumptions of radicalism to absurdity, since if the Nazi techniques for suppressing opposition are

like one. The time has come when he must assume the responsibilities and dignity of adult status.

It is the purpose of this article to attempt to demonstrate that the repression of the play impulse in adults is an arbitrary and largely harmful process, which results from the compulsions imposed by class stratification. The play impulse should be recognized as an important part of man's fundamental nature, and provided with adequate outlets, free from guilt and shame. Moreover, the separation between childhood and maturity is not imposed by nature as a sharp break. The process of human maturation is naturally smooth and gradual, and the naturally matured individual differs from a child only in the extent of his knowledge, the subtlety of his perceptions, and his greater physical strength, coordination and patience.

II.

In most societies that have developed beyond the level of simple hunting or agriculture, there exists a differentiation of the status of individuals in terms of social power, prestige, and consequently, in many instances, of economic privilege. The concept of status differentiation can arise in a society in a number of ways: from religion, as in Polynesia and certain African kingdoms; as a result of the conquest and subjugation of one group by another; or simply from the growth of distinctions between different occupational groups within a society. Even within a simple equalitarian society, like the Andaman Islanders or the Plains Indians, status differentiation, on the basis of age and achievement may occur. Once a system of status has been established, in whatever manner, it develops a life of its own, and persists with extraordinary tenacity from one generation to the next.

The ascription of higher status to adults than to children possesses a certain elementary logic especially within the framework of primitive economics, where success in the quest for food depends on a fairly high degree of coordination and experience. How-

ever, even this natural basis for differentiation tends to produce unfortunate psychological consequences. It gives rise to a continual pressure on the younger members of the community to grow out of their inferior status as quickly as possible and to regard everything associated with that status as contemptible and unworthy. Where the rise in status is directly linked with physical maturation, and the achievement of higher status is virtually automatic once one reaches a certain level of physical prowess, this emphasis is not entirely harmful, although the emphasis on status achievement frequently tends to speed up the process of social maturation until it is out of harmony with its physical basis, and rush the individual into adult status before he is really ready for it—thus giving rise to unnecessary anxieties and tensions. But when advancement in status is not directly a consequence of maturation, and where, as in most class societies, the achievement of adult status does not present the individual with a wider range of possible activity, but the reverse, its psychological consequences, are thoroughly deplorable.

For the lower levels of status in a class society, the amount of advancement possible is usually very little—practically speaking, the only certain way the unprivileged individual can advance himself in status is by growing up. In a class society, advancement in status is almost invariably one of the major preoccupations of the people, so the pressure on children, both internal and external, to relinquish their 'inferior' childlike ways and become adults is enormous, even when there is no immediate economic need for it.

Unfortunately, however, adult status in a class society permits greater scope for the individual's potentialities only in the realm of sexual adventures. In virtually every other respect, he is much more circumscribed than he was as a child, both by the pressure of economic necessity and that of social taboos. Especially on the lower levels of status, adulthood is defined in largely negative terms—the things one can no longer do without losing face are many, while the number of things he can now do that he was prevented from doing as a child is fairly negligible. He is free to take a

those who have gone into the army are far more numerous. And the behavior of the so-called anti-war radicals in general has been extremely timid and restrained, so much so, in fact, that the government has apparently decided that it has nothing to fear from them and has left them almost entirely alone. The one prosecution of any magnitude—the Minneapolis Teamsters Union case—was more the result of an intra-union political quarrel than of anti-war agitation, and in any case, the agitation that was used as evidence in the trial had occurred before this country entered the war. Since Pearl Harbor, there has been quite literally not a single case of radical anti-war activity on a scale to invite government repression. The one effort that was made to stop the war—the Peace Now Movement—a courageous and in many ways admirable beginning, was essentially liberal in its orientation, not going beyond urging its adherents to write to their congressmen, but the frenzied haste with which the radicals, including even some avowed pacifists, repudiated this organization, once the more venomous of the bourgeois newspapers began to smear it, reflected no credit on the quality of their radicalism. Some of the criticisms leveled against Peace Now were unquestionably justified—its standards for admitting members were too haphazard, its efforts to enlist the support of conservative politicians were opportunistic and naive, and its program was too vague and ineffectual to promise much hope of success. But such criticism could only be made honestly if the critics were themselves making a similar attempt on a sounder and more principled basis. As a matter of fact, however, these objections were raised primarily out of sheer fright at the prospect of being compromised by an organization which had the courage to stand up for the position which all radicals had always advocated—in peace-time—opposing the war in practice as well as in theory. Faced with this actual issue, their brave resolutions were forgotten and they ignominiously scuttled for cover behind a new-found sectarian purism that was both dishonest and disingenuous.

8. Left About-Face: Radicals and the War (Editorial) by Holley R. Cantine, Jr.

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I.

During the First World War, Randolph Bourne and other advanced thinkers who had managed to retain their sanity, found occasion to denounce the behavior of the liberals. In the Second World War, the antics of the liberals have been even worse, if that is possible, than they were last time, and, in addition, the majority of the radicals have thoroughly disgraced themselves. The record of American radicals during the last war was, on the whole, far more principled and courageous than that of their European counterparts. The actions of Debs and many of his followers, of the IWW and the Anarchists, notably Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, stood in sharp contrast to the spineless capitulation of the major radical parties of the Old World, and the renegacy of such outstanding figures as Kropotkin, Herve and Kautsky. This is not to say that all European radicals lacked integrity during that war, but certainly the number of capitulators made up a much larger percentage of the total membership than in this country.

In the present war, the European radicals have largely repeated their performance of last time, and the Americans have not been far behind. A considerable number of both organized and unaffiliated radicals have supported the war, and among those groups which have withheld their formal support, there has been no anti-war activity worth mentioning. There have been a number of radicals of military age who have preferred prison to the army, but

job—in fact compelled to—but the possibility of exercising his faculties in his work is infinitesimal in comparison with the creative outlets that even a slum-child possesses, and he is strongly discouraged from doing anything creative when he is not working, by the fear of being considered childish.

The lower one goes in the social hierarchy, the earlier the age of social maturity manifests itself. On the bottom, where the ONLY social advance is from childhood to 'maturity', boys in their early teens are already scornful of childishness and arbitrarily limit their play to such 'adult' pastimes as smoking, drinking, gambling and fornicating.

In the higher levels of the hierarchy, the pressure on children to grow up is somewhat less intense. Childhood lasts somewhat longer, and the transition is more gradual, but the process is not remarkably different and the end-result is almost as limited and circumscribed.

The desire for play is considerably stronger than any efforts that can be made to destroy it by social pressure, but when it is prevented from manifesting itself naturally and spontaneously it tends to become furtive and twisted. Adult play, in a class society, except for the few fields which are denied to children—chiefly sex and the indulgence in strong drink—must disguise itself as useful work in order to be socially acceptable. In most pre-capitalist class societies, the arts are identified with religion; dancing, the plastic art, music and poetry all tend to become incorporated into the religious rituals of the society, and thus become worthy occupation for adults.

In capitalist society, since religion has declined in importance, other justifications must be found. For the majority of adults, virtually the only socially sanctioned form of play is attending spectacles. These are usually disguised as business transactions by charging admission; the performers, since they are paid for practising their art, are, according to the peculiar logic of capitalism, workers, and therefore responsible members of society—baseball players, band leaders and musicians, movie actors are all workers. Card-

playing, which is one of the few other kinds of play that a 'responsible' adult may indulge in, must also be done for money, thus conveying the illusion that it is a form of business enterprise.

Under capitalism, work is broadly defined as any activity that can command a price on the market. It can be no more than time spent sitting around and doing nothing at all—not even watching or waiting for something to happen that requires attention. Thus, during the late war it was a not uncommon practice for factories working on government contracts to hire more men than they could use and pay the extra ones wages without giving them anything to do, since they were paid for their services to the government in proportion to the number of men they employed. These men, although conspicuously idle, were considered workers. They had to report for 'work' every day and remain on the premises until quitting time, just as if there was something for them to do. This is a rather extreme example, but the same basic idea is present in all jobs under capitalism. The activity can be entirely meaningless, but it is work if it is paid for.

Under capitalism, therefore, art is considered work when it is saleable, either as a commodity—a painting, for instance—or as a skill. An artist who cannot sell his art is not considered a full adult, unless, as sometimes happens, he is retroactively converted into a worker by finding a market for his hitherto worthless products. This phenomenon is frequently to be observed in the fate of the paintings of a so-called primitive painter, who paints as a hobby, with no thought of the market—and is generally considered a crazy eccentric by his neighbors—then they chance to fall into the hands of a professional art dealer and are sold by him for fabulous prices.

Those artists whose art is not saleable, but who for one reason or another persist in it—refusing to acquiesce in the socially accepted definition of worker—are in a difficult position in the matter of status. They are, in the main, jeered at as childish, and since only a very strong person can withstand this kind of pressure without being affected by it in some way, most of them tend to work out var-

resentment among the people. Then, having pretended to be cold over the Beveridge plan, they induced the Labour Party to adopt it as a basis for social security proposals, and in the end took the wind from the Labour sails by bringing forward a Churchillian social security scheme which in some respects was even better than Beveridge. Their great strategy, however, lies in the field of controls. The Labour Party, whose idea of socialism is little more than modified capitalism plus an enormous bureaucratic scheme of regulation, has talked glibly and foolishly of the need for maintaining controls after the war. The Tories, however, have realized that the people are completely tired of controls, and they are already preparing to launch a pseudo-libertarian programme, as the party who will abolish wartime restrictions. On such a programme they will win the elections hands down, unless in the meantime they commit some really fatal blunder. They will also be assisted by the half-conscious willingness of the Labour leaders to be defeated, because they doubt their own ability at the same time to govern and to retain any following among the people. Every indication shows that, for at least a decade, the Labour Party will be eclipsed by a triumphant Toryism. So far as the workers are concerned, I do not imagine the result will make much difference either way.

This is indeed a gloomy picture. But it is only if we take a completely realistic attitude towards political situations, and if we realize the strength of the forces against us, that we can really progress towards our ends. The major weakness of revolutionaries in the past has been their own unbounded optimism. In England today there is little reason for optimism, particularly concerning the immediate future.

January, 1945

storm of popular indignation, have evoked scarcely a ripple of response from the mass of the people. A great decline has taken place recently in the sales of every kind of political book and pamphlet. But there is no positive realization that the institutions of political coercion are evil in themselves and can be dispensed with.

I do not think there is any likelihood of a spontaneous social revolution in this country in a measurable space of time, and even if some form of widespread popular demonstration of anger takes place, I fear that the people are politically so naive that they will allow themselves to be led by authoritarian adventurers, either Communist or neo-Fascist (perhaps a successful military hero). All this might, of course, be changed by the emergence of an influential libertarian movement on the Continent. On the whole, however, I think that the ruling class has used the war to establish itself in a position where it will be virtually impregnable until a major economic crisis happens some years after the war. In spite of clumsy actions in recent months, the British ruling class remains the most cunning in the world, and is certain to continue its methods of educational and political conditioning coupled with economic bribery of the Beveridge type. On the old principle of 'divide and rule', any popular feeling that remains will be drawn off into the innocuous combat of party warfare between the two sections of the ruling class.

That a real struggle of interest does exist between the Tories and the Labour bureaucrats is undoubted. But it is a struggle for personal interests, in which the interests of the people are remote and secondary objects. Now, when the war may be over within a year, both parties are maneuvering into strategic positions for the post-war election struggle. So far, the Labour Party has acted with incompetent clumsiness and the Tories with a tactical subtlety which shows that the old capitalist ruling class is by no means so decadent as we had fondly imagined. Early in the war, the Tories prepared for their own future by appointing the Labour leaders, Bevin and Morrison, to the ministries whose operations would arouse the greatest

ious rationalizations for their art, which, while they rarely satisfy the more 'responsible' members of the community, at least afford the artists themselves a partial relief from feelings of guilt.

These rationalizations fall into two broad categories. Both of them are clearly derived from the association of art with religion in most pre-capitalist societies, but they have both been somewhat secularized, and they are bitterly antagonistic to each other.

The first category defines art in rather mystical terms, as an exalted profession, and considers the artist to be a sort of consecrated person, whose values and accomplishments are too refined to be appreciated by the vulgar, philistine majority. This group looks on commercial success as unworthy of the 'true' values of the artist, and to disparage those artists whose art is saleable—although they seldom refuse to sell their own, if and when an opportunity presents itself.

The other category considers the artist a sort of evangelist in the cause of the oppressed, whose function is to create propaganda for the revolution. Formerly confined to a handful of radical philosophers, this view has been coming into its own during the past twenty years, and has become the official State doctrine in Russia. While it is as emphatic in its repudiation of commercial success as is the first category, it rejects it not from an elevated esthetic evaluation, but because it is counter-revolutionary; in fact, it tends to lump the artists of the first category with those who work for the market, since they are not particularly concerned about the fate of the masses.

Those artists whose rationalization falls in the first category are at least not necessarily prevented by it from following their own inclinations—although the very esoteric character of their approach tends to promote cliquism—and in some cases are able to create in almost complete freedom from pressure of an esthetic nature. The second category, however, naturally tends to dogmatism and rigidity—frequently exceeding the commercial standards in inflexibility and coerciveness.

The plight of the artist in capitalist society is thus far from enviable. If he is to practice his profession at all, he is faced by three almost equally unenticing alternatives: He can accept the values of the system and work with an eye to the market—which means that he must turn out the sort of work that is marketable, regardless of his personal taste or inclination. This kind of art is seldom more satisfying than any other job in a capitalist enterprise. Secondly, he can join the self-conscious esthetes, where he will at least be permitted a certain amount of freedom to follow his own bent, but at the price of being despised by the majority, economically insecure, and, to some extent subject to the dicta of cults. In the third place, he can put himself into the hands of the self-appointed art-commissars, and dedicate his art to the cause of the oppressed. This means, in practice, that he must conform to the judgments of the commissars and curb his impulses almost as if he were working for the market.

In none of these three categories is the artist really free. When he repudiates the socially accepted concept of his role, he is still influenced by it to the extent that he accepts the premise that his art is a form of useful work and as such must be measured by a more or less fixed standard of acceptability, and is tormented by the fear that his art will be found wanting by whatever critics whose judgment he respects. Only a relative handful of spontaneous artists, who give no thought to any standards but their own satisfaction, can be said to function in the realm of pure art. They pursue their medium with the same lack of concern for external pressure that is characteristic of small children. In short, before the arts can become free, they must first be liberated from the idea that they are 'useful' in the sense that, say, carpentry is useful, and be considered from the standpoint of psychological criteria that are appropriate to their function.

position to the war and provide relatively honest social criticism. They often give themselves pretentious names, but their influence is little more than potential. In the right circumstances they might wield an influence completely disproportionate to their numbers and affect radically the course of political events.

This possibility the government appears to realize, for lately the police have been persecuting the Anarchists, Trotskyists and other objectors to social slavery. So far their efforts have been clumsily executed, and have only resulted in wider publicity for the movements concerned.

There is little real revolutionary feeling among the people, and large-scale demonstrations of popular discontent, such as strikes, have been considerably less formidable than many of the party-line revolutionaries maintain. They have been considerably smaller than at a comparable stage in the last war, and so far, except for the pitmen's strike in South Wales, have affected only a fraction of the war workers.

I fear all this seems gloomy, but I find in general among organized revolutionary groups an uncritical optimism and an inflated sense of their own importance which usually gives an unrealistic tone to their assessments of the state of mind of the workers, and often results in downright dishonesty in their propaganda.

The English workers in general have no revolutionary knowledge, and the traditions of the Owenites has long died out in the sleepy century of national education and parliamentary politics. They have endured probably a longer period of political conditioning than any other race, and so far they show few signs of discarding their political lethargy. Many of them have become disillusioned with the political party game, but so far very few of them have gone beyond apathy. They realize that politics today is a crooked game, but this results only in an attitude of leaving it to the politicians and attending to their own business. Even such scandalous events as the betrayal of the Warsaw rising and the British intervention in Greece, which fifty years ago would have roused a

merely as a point in favor of a more balanced integration of town and country life.

But most of the people would have endured a lean Christmas, if they could have had some kind of assurance of an early end of the war. Late in the summer no-one doubted that the war would be over very soon. Most people thought October a likely date—only the most pessimistic mentioned December. The government spokesmen and the military brasshats encouraged these beliefs by their own optimistic statements. This proved a very bad tactical line. Accompanied by relaxation of blackout and fireguard duties and the abolition of the Home Guard, it at first succeeded in placating the growing discontent, but when the military results failed to justify the hopefulness of the people, they became very cynical and disgruntled. Never, since 1939, have so many people been so completely tired of the war. Even those with the soft jobs are finding the nervous strain too great to carry on comfortably, and the flying bombs have done more than any quantity of anti-war propaganda could have achieved. "The war's been on too bloody long!" is a remark one hears everywhere, and now that the hopes of an early end are gone, there is no limit to the pessimism of the Jeremiahs, a pessimism largely justified by the unexpected demonstration of German strength in Belgium, and the large new call-ups in this country. No-one, of course, expects a German victory, but the end of the war is regarded as a good long way off.

Discontent, of a kind, is almost universal. There is much grumbling, but very few people do anything about their annoyance. The Labour Party, the Communists and the Trade Unions are useless as organs of popular anger—they have sold out to the government and survive as little more than state auxiliaries for disciplining the workers and keeping them loyal to the government 'line'. The remaining left-wing organizations, political and nonpolitical, are little more than nuclei, and for the most part, have much less influence than they claim. A few small papers, and a few groups of individuals, anarchist, pacifist, and left-socialist, maintain a steady op-

III.

It is necessary, before we can draw any conclusions about the relative value of play and useful work, to define precisely what we mean by useful work. Clearly the capitalistic definition is of no value to us, since it not only takes in far too much territory, but is based on a criterion that is only very remotely connected with genuine utility. The mere fact that something can be sold tells nothing of its actual value, as it is well known that there are plenty of people in existing society who can be induced to buy anything at all, or to part with their money for nothing.

Most concepts of utility that go beyond the simple capitalist definition still tend to be influenced by it to some extent. They usually define anything that goes to make up the standard of living of a middle-class family as useful—an entirely arbitrary procedure. From a strictly biological standpoint, the only work that can properly be considered useful is that which provides for actual bodily requirements—food, shelter. Since it is possible for man to remain healthy on a level not appreciably higher than the general living standard of other domestic animals, genuinely useful work clearly requires but a very small amount of time—even with quite primitive methods of production. All else, biologically speaking, is luxury—including privacy, more than a simple balanced diet, artificial light and practically everything else that is part of 'civilized living'.

The desire for more than a bare subsistence is virtually a universal phenomenon in human society, of course, but so is the desire for play. It is absurd to consider that luxury is any more important than play, or that the production of items of luxury is any more meaningful than playing. It is even highly probable that the desire for more than a few modest luxuries is a form of compensation for the frustration of the play impulse or some other instinct when it is not simply a product of the requirements of status achievement—

higher status being frequently indicated by an increase in material possessions.

In a society where there is no status stratification and thus no pressure on the individual to attempt to rise in the social hierarchy, the sharp distinction between children and adults that exists in status societies—and consequently the deprecating of play in favor of 'useful' activity—is not drawn. There may be, especially in difficult economic conditions, such as prevail among the Eskimos, for example, a purely economic pressure on everyone to contribute as much as possible to the food supply but this does not make for condescension toward children or a rigid differentiation between the roles of children and adults. On the contrary, the two roles tend to merge imperceptibly into one another. Children are treated with respect, as responsible members of the community, as soon as they can walk; their wishes and opinions are considered as seriously as those of anyone else. Likewise, in such a society, play is regarded as natural for everyone, whenever the immediate pressure of the environment permits. In non-status societies, like the Pueblo Indians, where the demands of the food quest are somewhat less severe, the amount of time devoted to non-utilitarian pursuits—decorating pots, story-telling—is at least as great as that consumed by practical work; and since even very small children perform some kind of useful function, the distinction between children and adults can hardly be said to exist. Everyone works, according to his capacity, when there is work to do, and everyone plays the rest of the time.

It seems to me that any really free society would be like this. Children would be encouraged to enter the workshops and participate in whatever work was going on, according to their capacity. However, since the major emphasis of the society would not be on production for its own sake, everyone would be free to devote a considerable part of their time to playful pursuits.

It is argued by some that in a society where man is free to pick his occupation without compulsion and to determine his own hours and working conditions, useful work would be sufficiently satisfy-

7. London Letter to Retort by George Woodcock

Retort, A quarterly journal of Anarchism, art and reviews, Spring, 1945

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Christmas has passed in an atmosphere of gloom and justified pessimism. The sudden change of events on the Belgian front—which seems to have extended the war by several months—and the periodic clatter of bombs falling somewhere in the vicinity of London, have made it the most uneasy Christmas since 1940. And, so far as Christmas comforts were concerned, it was the least abundant since the war started. Toys were shoddier and dearer than ever. Drink, when one could get it, was from ten to twenty times the peacetime prices. And, in London at least, it was only by the use of good lines of influence that one could procure any appreciable amount of food outside the official portions of rationed goods.

A visit in Christmas week to the Welsh Marches, a district fairly remote from London and moderately inaccessible except by car, gave me some idea of the contrast which exists, after five years of war, between town and country in England. There, in the small Elizabethan towns, I saw geese, ducks, chickens, pigeons, hanging in the shops to be bought freely by all comers. The fish shops were full of sole and plaice, the bakers' shops of mince pies and Christmas cake, the hardware stores still had large stocks of enamel ware, rubber cushions, oil stoves, commodities which in London have become almost as rare as the Great Auk. I mention these facts for two reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate the low level of varied living for the ordinary town dweller and the astonishment he experiences in encountering anything like a pre-war variety of food and other commodities. Secondly, they show to an extent the resilience and resourcefulness of a rural as distinct from an urban economy. I do not bring this up as a romantic plea for a return to the land, but

few decades. It is quite apparent that Comfort, like many other radicals today, does not see any possibility of improving society in the near future, but rather than retire from all activity, as so many of the others have done, he has worked out a concrete approach that is capable of being put into practice under the Total State. The best program in the world needs living men to carry it out, and until it is possible to act in a more constructive manner, survival is of paramount importance, a fact that too many leftists tend to overlook. Comfort's program might be open to serious criticism if it was nothing but a way of escaping, regardless of the means to be employed, but since he clearly indicates the importance of maintaining resistance to authority, and responsibility towards other individuals—as individuals—it could serve as the basis for a new and morally sounder radical movement. As Don Benedetto says to Spina in Silone's *Bread and Wine*, "One must respect time. Every season has its own work. There is the season for pruning the vines, the season for spraying them, the season for preparing the barrels, the season for gathering and pressing the grapes. If in spring, when the vines are being tied to the stakes, some one passes by and says, 'It is not worthwhile doing that, because if the barrels are bad the wine will be spoiled. The first thing to do is to attend to the barrels,' you can answer him and say, 'Every season has its own work. This is not the season for cleaning out the barrels, but for pruning the vines and tying them to the stakes. Let me therefore remove the useless branches from the vines.'" While Comfort perhaps leans a trifle over backwards in opposing the concept of 'mass' action, he is making a valuable contribution to radical thought in his insistence on the fact that the individual is the end of all social advance, and that to sacrifice individuals for the sake of some 'higher' good destroys the whole basis for the struggle for a good life.

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ing and enjoyable to take care of all creative needs. This argument, however, seems to me self-defeating, since if everyone were to devote his spare time to 'useful' work, so much stuff would be produced that it could no longer be considered useful. I can't imagine why an oversupply of clothes, food, houses and the like would provide greater satisfaction than if the surplus time was devoted to playful pursuits like art.

Moreover, there seems to be some factor in the makeup of humanity, to say nothing of other animals, which rebels against an excessive concentration of 'practical' activities, perhaps because these activities are, of necessity, too stereotyped to permit sufficient scope to individual ingenuity and caprice. The ways of performing practical tasks are rigidly limited by the end to be achieved, whereas in the arts it does not really matter what one does—the work is an end in itself, and need meet no tests of durability, balance or form, unless its creator arbitrarily so decides. Each practising artist determines for himself the rules he intends to follow and the effects he wants to achieve, and the success or failure of his achievement is ultimately a matter for him alone to decide.

Individual contributions naturally vary considerably, depending on the amount of time, emotional intensity and energy each individual devotes to his particular art form. However, whether or not certain individuals possess a natural superiority in their special field it is impossible to determine, since the criteria that can be used to judge such superiority are invariably too vague and subjective. It is fairly simple to set up standards to grade the skill of individuals in practical work, since there is general agreement about the ends to be achieved in such work. But in the arts, everyone can legitimately claim that he is attempting something entirely unique, and therefore his work cannot be measured by existing standards. The advantage of this from the standpoint of ego security is enormous.

The rules of art can best be viewed as the rules of a game—a game that is played by each artist alone—which are capable of infinite variation. A group of artists in a particular field may agree among

themselves to follow the same set of rules, but any one of them is always free to break with them if he wants to, and set up new rules for himself. Why then, should there be any rules at all? Why not adopt the simple principle that art is the free expression of the individual and disregard technical questions?

For those whose minds are sufficiently simple to be satisfied with sheer self-expression, obviously this principle is adequate; there are plenty of practising artists who could be cited as examples—artists to whom technique is of no importance, who approach art almost as small children do. But in most cases the human mind is too complex an organ to be content with such simple rules of the game—a fact which can be observed even in the art of children who have passed the age of five or six.

The human intellect is so constructed that it likes to solve problems, and when it is not confronted with enough problems in its daily experience, it tends to set up arbitrary ones and solve THEM. This tendency is not infrequently deplored as decadent and precious by those simple souls who are content with the raw outpourings of their psyches, but this seems to me an unwarranted assumption. Man, throughout the past several hundred thousand years, and his simian ancestors for countless millennia before that, have been constantly confronted by problems which they had to solve in order to survive. Therefore, it seems natural enough that the ability and desire to solve problems should have become part of the psychological heritage of humanity—a faculty which may ultimately be no longer particularly necessary for survival but which is still certainly of the greatest importance. Since this faculty exists, it is also natural that it should be used, and if the daily environment does not present enough difficulties to exercise it properly, as I passionately hope will someday be the case for everyone, it must be exercised in some arbitrary way, just as individuals who lead a sedentary existence require more or less arbitrary physical exercise in order to be healthy.

mitted ... 'Act up to your principles', whisper the thimble-riggers and prompters. You rush to help—every step you take crushes an innocent person—before you reach your objective, you are drenched in blood, and by now that objective has been skillfully moved out of reach. Never mind, they show you another... There is only one responsibility—to the individual who lies under your own feet."

Comfort has selected many incidents to illustrate his principles, with special emphasis on the futility of trying to do good by injuring others. It is a violent book, and death by violence plays an important part in it, but despite the fact that there is no display of moral indignation, one is left with a strong feeling that nothing of any value can be accomplished by violence. Thus when a group of underground workers undertake to blow up a German troop-train, in retaliation for the shooting of hostages, they only succeed in destroying a train filled with French civilians, killing a large number of them, and incidentally lose their ringleader to the Gestapo in the process. One might cavil that sabotage is not necessarily so wide of the mark, but cannot escape the conclusion that disasters like this are all too frequently the consequence of accepting such tactics. Similarly, an abortive uprising in a slave-labor camp accomplishes nothing but the killing of a handful of German common soldiers and the capture of all the rebels by the authorities, who have every intention of making an example of them.

The characters who represent Comfort's own viewpoint adopt, on the whole, a policy of artful dodging—yielding to the system when it cannot be avoided, but getting out of difficulties by faking illnesses etc., whenever they can. This program has been criticized by some because it is not sufficiently constructive; it does not offer any method for improving society, but only provides a possible escape for individuals. This criticism seems to me absurd. It has been the practice in radical circles entirely too long to deprecate individual action, and maintain that only 'mass' action is worth bothering with, a viewpoint that has its origin in the seizure-of-power complex that has dominated left-wing thinking for the past

all either Frenchmen or German soldiers, and represent a wide range of types and classes, including a collaborationist textile manufacturer, Gestapo agents, intellectuals, and several different categories of manual workers. A large part of the book—perhaps too large a part—is taken up with fairly technical descriptions of men at work. Comfort seems to know a great deal about machinery, and he writes about machines in motion imaginatively and dramatically, but I felt that he would have demonstrated the dominant position of the machine in modern life just as clearly without quite so many examples. The war sections, especially the retreat of the French army, are wonderfully handled. The atmosphere of chaos, disintegration and frustration that he creates is even more compelling than such first-hand accounts as Malaquais' *WAR DIARY*.

Comfort is a young English anarchist of the individualist school. His philosophy, as it emerges from *The Power House*, where it is expounded, in slightly different versions by several characters, is something like this: Man, as an individual, is rational and decent, but when he becomes part of an organization—the army, a political party, or whatever—he ceases to be an individual, and becomes a citizen—an unthinking automaton, whose actions, though ostensibly directed towards a good end, are irrational and destructive.

At the present time, since organizations are all-powerful, the only hope for the individual is to try to escape, by devious stratagems, from the demands of citizenship. To avoid being killed, which is his first duty as an individual, he must sometimes acquiesce outwardly, but in so doing he is very careful to keep himself from being submerged, and accepting the values of the citizen. He is always on the lookout for a way to escape, and he resists, whenever he can do it without unduly risking his life or causing injury to others:

every woman who hides a deserter, every clerk who doesn't scrutinize a pass, every worker who bungles a fuse, saves somebody's life for a while..." The supreme delusion of the citizen is that it is possible to do good by harming others: "There's a crime being com-

It is one of the primary errors of the nature-fetishers to assume that the mind and its faculties are not part of nature, but a peculiar excrescence grafted onto man by civilization, which will wither away once the Good Life has been achieved. Man is an animal, of course, but he differs from all other species primarily in the size and complexity of his brain, which is just as much a part of his natural endowment as the powerful legs of the horse or the sensitive nose of a dog are part of theirs. It is certainly a serious misunderstanding of the Darwinian hypothesis to assume that if and when a natural faculty is no longer absolutely necessary for survival (a condition which is clearly a long way from being fulfilled in the case of the human mind) it tends to disappear. The theory of survival simply indicates that those who possess the qualities necessary for survival will survive; there is no natural mechanism for eliminating unnecessary qualities unless they are actually detrimental to survival.

It might be considered that identifying the arts as play robs them of all dignity and significance. In my opinion, the exact opposite is the case. The forced attempt to make art into a species of useful work has only subordinated it to either church, the state, or business, unless it was prepared to live a hole-in-corner existence, despised by the majority—who instinctively recognize its playful character, but are prevented from accepting it for reasons of status. If the play impulse is recognized for what it is—one of the fundamental needs of mankind—art is not depreciated but truly liberated when it is understood as a manifestation of this impulse.

5. Conscription and the State (Retorting column) by Holley R. Cantine, Jr.

Retort, A quarterly journal of Anarchism, art and reviews, Spring, 1945

reprinted in *Retort Special Anthology Issue, 1942-1951*. *Retort* was originally published by the Retort Press, Bearsville, New York; Holley R. Cantine, Jr., Editor.

The campaign against post-war conscription is being prosecuted in the left-wing press with more enthusiasm than any issue has aroused since the Free India campaign of a few years back. Hardly a radical or pacifist publication has failed to take a stand on the question, and many of them are devoting considerable space to it. The issue is certainly a very important one, which well deserves the attention of all men of good will, but it might be relevant to inquire why, if conscription is as bad as its various opponents are demonstrating it is, with a very convincing display of evidence, they are not demanding its IMMEDIATE ABOLITION, instead of confining their opposition to conscription after the war is over.

While most of the arguments being used against conscription are reasonable and appropriate, there is a regrettable tendency for some leftists, carried away by their zeal for the campaign, to lose sight of the fact that the fight against conscription is only one aspect of the struggle for a better world, and to minimize equally serious threats to freedom, in order to make their case against conscription more acceptable to conservative public opinion. In some instances this has gone so far as to involve the use of arguments that are fundamentally out of harmony with the basic beliefs of their advocates. Certain pacifists, for example, have actually put themselves on record as opposing conscription because it is not an efficient way of raising an army. Such information, coming from such a source, is not likely to be taken seriously by anyone, and what is more important, it casts doubt on the seriousness of the pacifist convictions of those who gave it out.

Donald Calhoun's article in Vol. 2, No. 4 of *Retort* seems to me a good example of shortsightedness in the cause of anti-conscription. I think that he has made out an excellent case for the thesis that conscription is fundamentally antagonistic to civil liberties and the rights of labor, but I believe he has badly confused the issue and

Street Government finance a program of military training under the control of the unions. Superficially, this might appear to be asking rather a lot of the Wall Street Government, but not if one understands the Marxist-Leninist approach. It is really just a tactic, designed to prove to the workers that the status quo is rotten. It works something like this. The workers are urged to fight for their own conscription program, a demand which should appeal to the average worker as eminently just and reasonable. The Wall Street Government, however, would never grant such a demand, so the workers, outraged at having their just demand refused, overthrow the government. Simple, isn't it? The only problem is to convince the workers that it is just—or for that matter sane—to demand that the government finance a program designed solely to facilitate its overthrow.

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6. Books by Holley R. Cantine, Jr.

Retort, A quarterly journal of Anarchism, art and reviews, Spring, 1945

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a review of

The Power House by Alex Comfort. Viking. \$3.00.

In these days, when the publishing industry is prostituting itself to the War-Effort, throwing overboard its esthetic and intellectual standards in the interests of patriotism, it is not a little surprising, and very gratifying, to discover that a book like *The Power House*, which is uncompromisingly opposed to war and all forms of government, can still be published.

The Power House is laid in France, during the period from about a year before the war to the summer of 1941. The characters are

state powers.” The state must be resisted in all of its manifestations, because every increase in its powers, no matter how desirable it may appear on the surface, serves to strengthen its position in society, and therefore its threat to all civilized values. Recent radical thought has shown itself all too accommodating to the idea that freedom can be preserved by means of ‘democratic controls’ on an extended state apparatus: that the ‘good’ attributes of the total state—its efficiency and ability to plan—can be harnessed for the purpose of beneficent social reconstruction, and its menace to human rights negated by a few checks and balances. This seems dangerous nonsense to me, inasmuch as the efficiency and planning of totalitarianism are MADE POSSIBLE by its control over all aspects of life, and would cease to exist without that control.

It is of the utmost importance that radicals, in their campaign against peacetime conscription, keep in mind that a victory on this issue will not mean that the struggle is over, but is merely a step in the long and painful reconquest of the right of the people to control their own destinies, free from supervision and domination by a powerful bureaucracy.

For comic relief on this serious question, there is the stand of the Socialist Workers Party. Unlike most other leftist parties, the Cannonites do not oppose military conscription without qualifications (the Communists and the Social-Democrats are both pro-conscription, but then neither of these can be considered leftist parties according to any plausible definition of leftism). The SWP is of course indignant at the prospect of Wall Street Prussianizing American Youth, but “all important problems of humanity will be solved eventually arms in hand; it would be stupid, therefore, on the part of labor to simply oppose compulsory military training. The working class must call for military training ... under its own control instead of the control of Wall Street.” (The Militant, Dec. 16, 1944.) In other words, in order to be better prepared for the eventual revolutionary overthrow of Wall Street, the workers need military training. They must therefore demand that the Wall

greatly weakened his position by his insistence on distinguishing between conscription and other forms of state coercion in an academic and on the whole meaningless manner. Either to placate public opinion, or because he thinks of the state as a possible agency of social reconstruction and does not want it to be deprived of powers which may someday be utilized for ‘good’ purposes, he finds it necessary to draw a sharp moral distinction where at most there is only a difference of degree. Conscription, according to Calhoun, coerces the personality while other forms of government coercion do not. This formulation strikes me as naive and superficial, inasmuch as any form of state coercion can be and frequently is utilized for the purpose of coercing the personality. By creating the impression that this is not the case, Calhoun, in effect, is giving a kind of backhanded moral sanction to vagrancy laws, poll taxes, etc. Conscription, it is true, is an extreme example of state coercion, but it is not fundamentally different from other forms. The assumption that “individuals may properly be considered means to political ends,” which Calhoun regards as peculiarly tied up with conscription, is actually the characteristic basis of all governmental thinking.

“All restrictions on property,” says Calhoun, “... fall outside the question involved in the conscription issue... The state may levy taxes as it sees fit...” In other words, the power to tax cannot be employed to coerce the personality. This is ridiculous. Suppose, for example, the government, instead of passing a conscription law, were to require that all men reaching military age pay a huge cash indemnity unless they ‘voluntarily’ enlisted in the army. This may seem to be an arbitrary example, but as a matter of fact it is almost precisely the technique that is employed by British Imperialism in Africa and other colonial regions to persuade the natives to abandon their sinful heathen idleness and go to work in the mines and plantations of the master race. First, the power of taxation is established over a nominally independent tribe (by a complicated process, combining cajolery, threats and the liberal use of Quislings, which need not concern us here). Then a head tax is levied, and

by degrees increased, until it is impossible for a man to continue to live according to his tribal ways, but must volunteer for outside labor in order to raise tax money. If this is not "requiring the individual to alter the vocational life enterprise which he has chosen... and embark on one the state may choose for him," I would like to know what it is.

"The state may legitimately decree a certain, relatively small, number of acts forbidden and prohibit people under penalty of law from doing these things." This also provides plenty of loopholes for the coercion of personality, the best known of which is the vagrancy law, whereby the state penalizes individuals for the "offense" of having no means of support. Penal laws of this character have been frequently employed to provide forced labor for building roads, etc., and could easily be used to raise an army without the need of a conscription law.

"The state ... may lay down conditions of employment," says Calhoun, and later he speaks of the "need for establishing incentives for socially desirable behavior, while leaving the choices themselves free from direct coercion," going on to mention a number of "non-coercive" techniques a collectivist state might employ to induce individuals to enter unpopular vocations. This approach, reflecting as it does the typical radical intellectual's mistrust of the worker, whom he feels it necessary to manipulate, like a donkey with a carrot, is certainly not very far removed from the attitude that "individuals may properly be considered means to political ends," and an unscrupulous government would have no difficulty in using such techniques to raise an army or to coerce individuals to do anything else it desired without having to resort to actual conscription. Simply making the conditions of employment in every field but the army very difficult for those individuals it wanted to 'volunteer' would be quite coercive enough for all practical purposes. The number of men who would accept starvation wages rather than go into the army is probably no greater than those who would refuse to accept conscription.

The 'moral capital' of freedom in this country has long ago been exhausted. The phrase about "inalienable rights" which Calhoun quotes from the Declaration of Independence has never been respected by the government, which has invariably acted in its own interests, and disregarded the welfare and wishes of the people whenever it was able to get away with it. Left-wing thinkers who persist in creating the impression that the government can be made to respond to moral appeals, thereby helping to perpetuate the myth of responsible government, are doing the cause of radicalism more harm than good. Moreover, narrowing the fight against state coercion to the single issue of conscription, and attempting to arouse public opinion on that issue alone is merely inviting the government to resort to subterfuge to achieve its ends. Let us not forget that public opinion in America was aroused against getting into war before Pearl Harbor, that the government, by means of a series of indirect maneuvers, designed, so we were told, to keep us out, succeeded in jockeying the country into such a position that it was nonetheless drawn in.

The fight against conscription can only be really effective if it is conducted as a fight against the state, since conscription is merely the most obvious expression of the government's drive to reduce all individuals to the status of pawns whose every action it can control. This drive is absolutely basic in all governmental thinking—it is to the bureaucrat what the desire for profit is to the capitalist. When government is weak, its repressive urge is confined to matters of petty detail, but when the state emerges as the strongest single force in society, as it is emerging today throughout the world, its desire to reduce everything to a fixed pattern finds full expression and pervades every aspect of life. Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany have shown how far an unrestricted government is capable of going in this direction, and should serve as a warning of the potentialities latent in government. To combat this monster is the first duty of all sincere radicals, and they cannot afford to ignore its full implications, and blind themselves with illusions about "legitimate