

I Hate Max Lerner

by Murray N. Rothbard

All my life, it seems, I have hated the guts of Max Lerner. Now, make no mistake: there is nothing personal in this rancor. I have never met, nor have I ever had any personal dealings with, Max. No, my absolute loathing for Max Lerner is disinterested, cosmic in its grandeur. It's just that ever since I was a toddler, this ugly homunculus, this pretentious jackass, has been there, towering over the American ideological scene. In the fifty-five years that I have been aware of Max's presence, in all of his many permutations and combinations and seeming twists and turns, he has taken the totally repellent position at every step of the way. Thus:

I hated Max Lerner when he was a brilliant young editor of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, spreading his Marxo-Veblenian poison for the decades that that publication was highly influential in American intellectual life.

I hated Max Lerner when (in 1937) he wrote an introduction to the Modern Library edition of the *Wealth of Nations*, in which he dismissed Adam Smith, in Marxo-Freudo lingo, as "an unconscious mercenary in the service of the rising capitalist class."

I hated Max Lerner when he was a Stalinist apologist before, during, and after World War II. I hated his pompous, sing-song Stalinoid delivery when he was a radio commentator in New York just after the war.

I hated Max Lerner when, in the unforgettable imagery of that hilarious and perceptive work by Dwight Macdonald, *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, reporter Lerner, advancing through Germany at the end of World War II, leaped from an army jeep to confront an elderly shell-shocked German farming couple, asking them: "Do you feel guilty?" after which he proceeded to a gala banquet with Red Army generals, wolfing down caviar and toasting each other with champagne.

I hated Max Lerner when, leaping on the "consensus" bandwagon in the 1950s, he ignored all conflicts and problems and celebrated *America as a Civilization*.

I hated Max Lerner when, in his insufferably clotted and tedious

column in the *New York Post*, he began to boast about being the "patriarch" of his newly-burgeoning family.

I hated Max Lerner when he abandoned that family to take up permanent residence in Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion, there celebrating the sleazy joys of hedonism.

I hated Max Lerner when he became a pro-Vietnam War liberal and then a Reaganite.

And now I hate Max Lerner especially when, now – of course – a neocon, he emerges, at the age of 180 or whatever, out of his residence at the Playboy Mansion (Hefner himself having thrown in the towel on the hedonic life), to join the Smear Bund in their assault on Pat Buchanan (*Washington Times*, Oct. 8). But leave it to Max to add that special Lernerian twist, in which he shows himself not at all different from the Original Lerner of long ago.



In his newspaper column Lerner commits his foul act in the course of a running smear of Charles Lindbergh (the excuse is a review of a documentary on the Lone Eagle) in which Lerner shamelessly resurrects the old, discredited Rooseveltian-Stalinist lies about Lindbergh being pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic.

So, Max. Here we are again, old buddy. What goes around comes around, eh? After fifty-five years we can close the books at last. Marxist, Veblenite, Stalinist, 50s consensus-man, pro-war liberal, Reaganite, neocon, what in Hell's the difference? Nothing's changed. Two constants loom through all the gyrations of your life. You've always been a pompous, humorless egomaniac. And you've always worshiped at the shrine of war and the State. So what else is new?