

EDITORIAL:

New Right:

National Review's Anniversary

In the fall of 1965, National Review celebrated its 10th anniversary, and part of the record of its orgy of self-congratulation may be found in its November 30 issue. The magazine has, during its decade, even achieved the ultimate: for the issue contains the major part of a book in the process of publication, the bulk of which is solemnly devoted to the petty internal theoretical squabbles among the National Review editors and assorted contributors. To have a young professor of English--author of this tome--really think it important whether a true Conservative should worship Burke or Madison, the Crown of St. Stephen or the Crown of St. Wenceslas (for of such stuff are its intra-journal discussions made), demonstrates that National Review has arrived as a serious force in American life.

But National Review has accomplished far more than this, far more perhaps than even it realizes; in much less than a decade it has managed virtually single-handed, to effect a massive transformation in the nature of the Right-wing in America. This is a transformation that has gone virtually unrecognized by the Right-wing itself, never the most reflective of groupings, as well as by most observers of the American ideological scene.¹

-
1. There are only two analyses of this phenomenon: Ronald Hamowy, "National Review: Criticism" and "Rejoinder", in New Individualist Review (November, 1961), pp. 3-7, 10-11; and Murray N. Rothbard, "The Transformation of the American Right," Continuum (Summer, 1964), pp. 220-231.

The outer trappings of National Review's "take-over" are clear enough: the founding of the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) at Bill Buckley's estate at Sharon, Connecticut, and the subsequent emergence of YAF as the political-action youth arm of the Conservative Movement, especially on campus; the major role of National Review publisher Bill Rusher in the newly-won conservatism of the Young Republican movement; the prominent role of National Review-types in the Draft Goldwater campaign as well as that of Brent Bozell (Buckley's brother-in-law and then an NR editor) in helping to ghost Goldwater's best-selling Conscience of a Conservative; the founding by NR-oriented people of the Conservative Party of New York; Bill Buckley's emergence as the Number One TV "personality" of the Right-wing, and the general admiration expressed for him as such a personality by the New York press during Buckley's 1965 campaign for Mayor. Neither are the reasons for the ease of NR's takeover of the Right-wing difficult to find. The Right-wing in America has never been distinguished for the intensity of its intellectual life; and those scattered intellectuals that did exist on the right generally confined themselves to the brief exposition of general principles. Such exposition is all very well, but hardly suffices to generate a sturdy ideological, let alone a political, movement. Into this vacuum at the top, then, stepped National Review: witty, polished, glib, erudite, and ready to do battle, week in and week out, with at least the Liberal wing of the Establishment. It is then not surprising that NR quickly leaped to the leadership of the Right-wing, that it inspired a youth and an intellectual movement, nor that the mass of rightists were unreflectively eager to accept that lead.

So much for the trappings and the reasons; more important is the content of the radical transformation from Old Right to New. Without detailing the views and principles of the Old Right here (since recalling and examining them is one of the major purposes of this magazine), we may cite a few examples as a guide to the enormous distance that the New Right has travelled under the aegis of National Review:

(1) At the end of 1955, FOR AMERICA, a leading right-wing political action group of the day, published its platform; two of its major foreign policy planks were: "ABOLISH CONSCRIPTION", and "Enter NO FOREIGN WARS unless the safety of the United States is directly threatened". It was not exactly an advanced peace platform, but it was squarely anti-militarist and anti-foreign intervention, and there was not a line in the document about stopping Communism all over the world, liberating Communist countries, etc.

(2) In 1954, the novelist Louis Bromfield published a political work that praised individualism and denounced statism, war, conscription, and imperialism. Bromfield wrote:

One of the great failures of our foreign policy throughout the world arises from the fact that we have permitted ourselves to be identified everywhere with the old, doomed, and rotting colonial-imperialist small European nations which once imposed upon so much of the world the pattern of exploitation and economic and political domination. . . . None of these rebellious, awakening peoples will. . . trust us or cooperate in any way so long as we remain identified with the economic colonial system of Europe, which represents, even in its capitalistic pattern, the last remnants of feudalism. . . We leave these awakening peoples with no choice but to turn to Russian and communist comfort and promise of Utopia. . .

The growing "neutralism" of the European nations is merely a reasonable, sensible, and civilized reaction, legitimate in every respect when all the factors from Russia's inherent weaknesses to our own meddling and aggressiveness are taken into consideration. . . The Korean situation . . . will not be settled until we withdraw entirely from an area in which we have no right to be and leave the peoples of that area to work out their own problems. . .²

2. Louis Bromfield, A New Pattern for A Tired World (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), pp. 49-50, 73-74.

(3) In the spring of 1953, George Morgenstern, historian and editorial writer for the Chicago Tribune, published an article in the right-wing weekly Human Events (now tragically become a hack organ for the "Conservative Movement"). The article was a trenchant attack on U. S. imperialism since the days of McKinley:

At the end of the 19th Century the United States began to stir with those promptings of imperialism and altruism which have worked to the mischief of so many puissant states. The sinister Spaniard provided a suitable punching bag. Two days before McKinley went to Congress with a highly misleading message which was an open invitation to war, the Spanish government had agreed to the demands for an armistice in Cuba and American mediation. There was no good reason, but there was war anyway. We wound up the war with a couple of costly dependencies, but this was enough to intoxicate the precursors of those who now swoon on very sight of the phrase "world leadership".

McKinley testified that in lonely sessions on his knees at night he had been guided to the realization that we must "uplift and civilize and Christianize" the Filipinos. He asserted that the war had brought new duties and responsibilities 'which we must meet and discharge as becomes a great nation on whose growth and career from the beginning the Ruler of Nations has plainly written the high command and pledge of civilization.' This sort of exalted nonsense is familiar to anyone who later attended the evangelical rationalizations of Wilson for intervening in the European war, of Roosevelt promising the millenium. . . of Eisenhower treasuring the "crusade in Europe" that somehow went sour, or of Truman, Stevenson, Paul Douglas, or the New York Times preaching the holy war in Korea. . .

An all-pervasive propaganda has established a myth of inevitability in American action: all wars were necessary, all wars were good. The burden of proof rests with those who contend that America is better off, that American security has been enhanced, and that prospects of world

peace have been improved by American intervention in four wars in half a century. Intervention began with deceit by McKinley; it ends with deceit by Roosevelt and Truman.

Perhaps we would have a rational foreign policy . . . if Americans could be brought to realize that the first necessity is the renunciation of the lie as an instrument of foreign policy.³

That these views are diametrically opposed to the current New Right and its intellectual organ, National Review, need hardly be documented; we need only add that NR's--and its favorite candidate, Barry Goldwater's--most cherished President is undoubtedly Theodore Roosevelt, the embodiment of the very imperialist vices that Mr. Morgenstern so vigorously denounced. And can we for example, imagine Senator Taft, the political leader of the Old Right, rushing to the defense of the fascist regime of South Africa? Neither is the transformation from Old to New Right confined to foreign affairs, although there it is the most glaring. For a Right-wing that used to be at least partially devoted to the civil liberty of the individual now puts up as candidate for Mayor of New York City William F. Buckley, whose major political position was to denounce all libertarian restraints upon the police power and call, in essence, for all power to the police.

In the last few years, as it has sniffed the heady wine of imminent political power, National Review has become increasingly Establishment-y and increasingly concerned to oust from Right-wing ranks all groups that might prove a political embarrassment. For example, Mr. Robert Welch and the John Birch Society, who embarrass the Conservative Movement by accepting its own major premises (such as the bogey of the all-pervasive "international Communist conspiracy") and deduce from it, with far better logic than wielded by the sophisticates of National Review, absurd but consistent conclusions (e.g. Welch on Eisenhower as a dedicated Communist.) National Review's increasingly savage attacks

3. George Morgenstern, "The Past Marches On", Human Events (April 22, 1953).

on the Birch Society are attacks on its own Logical Conscience. The attacks escalated in late 1965 when Mr. Welch came out in favor of U. S. withdrawal from Vietnam. By thus directly opposing NR's cherished policy of global war, the Birch Society finally put itself beyond the pale--totally outside that magazine's cherished Conservative "community."

National Review has reason to look back upon its ten years and be proud. It has accomplished most of what it set out to do: it has managed to transform the American Right from essentially old-fashioned liberalism to old-fashioned Conservatism, with all the devotion to war, theocracy, the State police, and racism that the change implies. It managed to nominate one of the New Right's very own as a major party presidential candidate. If the Great Consensus of the Center should falter in its slow but sure course of extirpating American freedom, NR and the New Right stand ready to present us with an alternative: finishing the task quickly and dramatically. To some of us, this kind of "choice" is all too magnified an "echo". But there are strong signs that the Conservative Movement peaked in 1964 and has been declining rapidly ever since, and perhaps we can look forward to a rather less exuberant and gala celebration on National Review's fifteenth anniversary.