



The Transformation of the American Right



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In the spate of recent books and articles on the burgeoning conservative movement, little has been said of its governing ideas and its intellectual leadership. Instead, attention has been centered on the mass phenomena of the Right-wing: The Billy James Hargises, the Birchers, the various crusaders for God and country. And yet, the neglect of the ruling ideas of the Right-wing has obscured its true nature, and has hidden an enormous and significant change in the very nature of the Right that has taken place since World War II. In fact, due to the total absence of dialogue between various parts of the political spectrum in this country, both Right and Left are largely conducting their argument in what used to be called a severe "cultural lag"; both sides still mistakenly believe that the categories of the debate are the same as they were immediately after the war. In particular, under cover of a certain continuity of rhetoric, the intellectual content and goals of the Right-wing have been radically transformed in the last decade and a half, and this transformation has gone virtually unnoticed on either Right or Left.

The modern American Right began, in the 1930's and 1940's, as a reaction against the New Deal and the Roosevelt Revolution, and specifically as an opposition to the critical increase of statism and state intervention at home, and to war and state intervention abroad. The guiding *motif* of what we might call the "old American Right" was a deep and passionate commitment to individual liberty, and to the belief that this liberty, in the personal and the economic spheres, was gravely menaced by the growth and power of the Leviathan state, at home and abroad. As individuals and libertarians, the old Right felt that the growth of statism at home and abroad were corollaries: New Deal coercion, on behalf of an illusory domestic security, was matched by the ultimate coercion of war in pursuit of the illusion of "collective security" abroad; and both forms

of intervention brought with them a swelling of state power over society and over the individual. At home, the Supreme Court was looked to for a "strict construction" of the Constitution to check governmental depredation of the liberty of the individual, and conscription was denounced as a return to an unconstitutional form of involuntary servitude.

As the force of the New Deal reached its heights, both foreign and domestic, during World War II, a beleaguered and tiny libertarian opposition began to emerge and to formulate its total critique of prevailing trends in America. Unfortunately, the Left, almost totally committed to the cause of World War II as well as to extensions of the domestic New Deal, saw in the opposition not a principled and reasoned stand for liberty, but a mere blind "isolationism" at best, and, at worst, a conscious or unconscious "parroting of the Goebbels line." It should not be forgotten that the Left, not so long ago, was not above engaging in its own form of plot-hunting and guilt-by-association. If the Right had its McCarthys and Dillings, the Left had its John Roy Carlsons.

Now it is certainly true that much of this nascent and emerging libertarian Right was tainted with blind chauvinism, with scorn of "foreigners," etc., and that even then an unfortunate bent for plot-hunting was becoming evident. But still the prevailing trend, certainly among the intellectuals of the Right, was a principled and trenchant opposition to war and to its concomitant destruction of life and liberty, and of human values. The Beardian ideal of abstention from European wars was essentially not a chauvinist scorn of the stranger, but a call for America to harken to its ancient aim of serving the world as a beacon-light of peace and liberty, rather than as master of a house of correction to set everyone in the world aright by force of bayonet. If the "isolationists" were not themselves libertarian, they were at least moving in that direction, and their ideas needed only refinement and systematization to arrive at that goal. In the devotion to peace, in the anxiety to limit and confine state military interventions and consequent wars, there was little difference between the Right-wing principle of neutrality of a generation ago, and the Left-wing principle of neutralism today. When we realize this, the essential obsolescence of the old categories of "Right" and "Left" begins to become clear.

The intellectual leaders of this old Right of World War II and the immediate aftermath were then and remain today almost unknown among the larger body of American intellectuals: Albert Jay Nock, Rose Wilder Lane, Isabel Paterson, Frank Chodorov, Gareth Garrett. It almost takes a great effort of the will to recall the principles and Objectives of the old Right, so different is the current Right-wing today. The stress, as we have noted, was on individual liberty in all its aspects as against state power: on freedom of speech and action, on economic liberty, on voluntary relations as opposed to coercion, on a peaceful foreign policy. The great threat to that liberty was state power, in its invasion of personal freedom and private property and in its burgeoning military despotism. Philosophically, the major emphasis was on the natural rights of man, arrived at by an investigation through reason of the laws of man's nature. Historically, the intellectual heroes of the old Right were such libertarians as John Locke, the Levellers, Jefferson, Paine, Thoreau, Cobden, Spencer, and Bastiat.

In short, this libertarian Right based itself on eighteenth and nineteenth century liberalism, and began systematically to extend that doctrine even further. The contemporary canon of the Right consisted of Nock's *Our Enemy the State* and *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*, Paterson's *The God of the Machine* (the chapter, "Our Japanized Educational System," virtually launched the postwar

reaction against progressive education), and H. L. Mencken's *A Mencken Chrestomathy*. Its organ of opinion was the now-forgotten monthly broadsheet *analysis*, edited by Nock's leading disciple, Frank Chodorov. The political thought of this group was well summarized by Chodorov:

"...the state is an anti-social organization, originating in conquest and concerned only with confiscating production.... There are two ways of making a living, Nock explained. One is the *economic means*, the other the *political means*. The first consists of the application of human effort to raw materials so as to bring into being things that people want; the second is the confiscation of the rightful property of others....

"The state is that group of people, who having got hold of the machinery of compulsion, legally or otherwise, use it to better their circumstances; that is the *political means*." Nock would hasten to explain that the state consists not only of politicians, but also those who make use of the politicians for their own ends; that would include those we call pressure groups, lobbyists and all who wangle special privileges out of the politicians. All the injustices that plague "advanced" societies, he maintained, are traceable to the workings of the state organizations that attach themselves to these societies.

When the cold war so swiftly succeeded World War II, the old Right was not bemused – let alone did it lead the war-cry. It is difficult to conceive now that the main political opposition to the cold war was led, not by the Left, then being brought into the war-camp by the ADA, but by the "extreme-Right-wing Republicans" of that era: by the Howard Buffetts and the Frederick C. Smiths. It was this group that opposed the Truman Doctrine, NATO, conscription and American entry into the Korean War – with little grateful acknowledgement by Left-wing peace groups then or now. In attacking the Truman Doctrine on the floor of Congress, Rep. Buffett, who was to be Taft's Midwestern campaign manager in 1952, declared:

"Even if it were desirable, America is not strong enough to police the world by military force. If that attempt is made, the blessings of liberty will be replaced by coercion and tyranny at home. Our Christian ideals cannot be exported to other lands by dollars and guns. Persuasion and example are the methods taught by the Carpenter of Nazareth, and if we believe in Christianity we should try to advance our ideals by his methods. We cannot practice might and force abroad and retain freedom at home. We cannot talk world cooperation and practice power politics."

Among the intellectual leadership of the old Right, Frank Chodorov vigorously set forth the libertarian position on both the cold war and the suppression of communists at home. The latter was summed up in the aphorism, "The way to get rid of communists in government jobs is to abolish the jobs." Or, more extensively:

"And now we come to the spy-hunt – which is, in reality, a heresy trial. What is it that perturbs the inquisitors? They do not ask the suspects: Do you believe in Power? Do you adhere to the idea that the individual exists for the glory of the state? . . . Are you against taxes, or would you raise them until they absorbed the entire output of the country? . . . Are you opposed to the principle of conscription? Do you favor more 'social gains' under

the aegis of an enlarged bureaucracy? . . . Such questions might prove embarrassing to the investigators. The answers might bring out a similarity between their ideas and purposes and those of the suspected. They too worship Power. Under the circumstances, they limit themselves to one question: Are you a member of the Communist Party? And this turns out to mean, have you aligned yourselves with the Moscow branch of the church?

"Power-worship is presently sectarianized along nationalistic lines . . . each nation guards its orthodoxy. . . . Where Power is attainable, the contest between rival sects is unavoidable. If, as seems likely, the American and Russian cults come into violent conflict, apostasy will disappear. . . . War is the apotheosis of Power, the ultimate expression of the faith and solidification of its achievement. . . .

". . . The case against the communists involves a principle of freedom that is of transcending importance. It is the right to be wrong. Heterodoxy is a necessary condition of a free society. . . . The right to make a choice . . . is important to me, for the freedom of selection is necessary to my sense of personality; it is important to society, because only from the juxtaposition of ideas can we hope to approach the ideal of truth.

"Whenever I choose an idea or label it 'right,' I imply the prerogative of another to reject that idea and label it 'wrong.' To invalidate his right is to invalidate mine. . . . If men are punished for espousing communism, shall we stop there? Once we deny the right to be wrong we put a vise on the human mind and put the temptation to turn the handle into the hands of ruthlessness."

And, in May 1949, Chodorov, praising a pamphlet on *The Militarization of America* issued by The National Council Against Conscription, wrote that "The state cannot intervene in the economic affairs of society without building up its coercive machinery, and that, after all, is militarism. Power is the correlative of politics."

The old Right reached its full flower in devotion to peace during the Korean War, which provoked several trenchant efforts during the early 1950's. The Foundation for Economic Education, generally concerned with free-market economics, devoted several studies to the problem. Thus, Leonard E. Read wrote in *Conscience on the Battlefield* (1951):

"It is strange that war, the most brutal of man's activities, requires the utmost delicacy in discussion War is liberty's greatest enemy, and the deadly foe of economic progress To fight evil with evil is only to make evil general."

In the same year, Dr. F. A. Harper published an FEE pamphlet, *In Search of Peace*, in which he wrote:

"Charges of pacifism are likely to be hurled at anyone who in troubled times raises any question about the race into war. If pacifism means embracing the objective of peace, I am willing to accept the charge. If it means opposing all aggression against others, I am willing to accept the charge also. It is now urgent in the interest of liberty that many persons become 'peacemongers'.

"So the nation goes to war, and while war is going on, the real enemy [the idea of slavery] – long ago forgotten and camouflaged by the processes of war – rides on to victory in both camps. . . . Further evidence that in war the attack is not leveled at the real enemy is the fact that we seem never to know what to do with 'victory.'

". . . Are the 'liberated' peoples to be shot, or all put in prison camps, or what? Is the national boundary to be moved? Is there to be further destruction of the property of the defeated. Or what? . . . False ideas can be attacked only with counter-ideas, facts, and logic. . . . Nor can the ideas of [Karl Marx] be destroyed today by murder or suicide of their leading exponent, or of any thousands or millions of the devotees. . . . Least of all can the ideas of Karl Marx be destroyed by murdering innocent victims of the form of slavery he advocated, whether they be conscripts in armies or victims caught in the path of battle."

Ideas must be met by ideas, on the battlefield of belief. And, as late as May 1955, Dean Russell wrote, in FEE's *The Conscription Idea*:

"Those who advocate the 'temporary loss' of our freedom in order to preserve it permanently are advocating only one thing: the abolition of liberty. . . . However good their intentions may be, those people are enemies of your freedom and my freedom; and I fear them far more than I fear any potential Russian threat to my liberty. These sincere but highly emotional patriots are clear and present threats to freedom; the Russians are still thousands of miles away. . . .

The Russians would only attack us for either of two reasons: fear of our intentions or retaliation to our acts. . . . As long as we keep troops in countries on Russia's borders, the Russians can be expected to act somewhat as we would act if Russia were to station troops in Guatemala or Mexico. . . .

"I can see no more logic in fighting Russia over Korea or Outer Mongolia, than in fighting England over Cyprus, or France over Morocco. . . . The historical facts of imperialism . . . are not sufficient reasons to justify the destruction of freedom within the United States by turning ourselves into a permanent garrison state. . . . We are rapidly becoming a caricature of the thing we profess to hate."

There is no need to multiply examples. Frank Chodorov consistently worked against the war drive in *analysis* and later, in 1954, as editor of the *Freeman*. The Right-wing libertarian journal *Faith and Freedom* featured, in April, 1954, an all-peace issue, with contributions by Garet Garrett, Robert LeFevre, the industrialist Ernest T. Weir, and the present writer. We might elaborate here on two neglected contributions in that period. One was an essay by Garrett ("The Rise of Empire," 1952, reprinted in *The People's Pottage*, 1953) which pin-pointed the main issue of our time as the rise of a deplorable American imperialism: "We have crossed the boundary that lies between Republic and Empire." The other was a relatively unnoticed book by Louis Bromfield, *A New Pattern for a Tired World* (1954), which decried statism, war, conscription, and imperialism. Bromfield wrote with conviction of imperialism and of the revolution of the undeveloped countries:

"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."

And on American cold-war policy, Bromfield charged:

"Our warmongers and the military apparently believe . . . that all other nations are unimportant and can be trampled under foot the moment either Russia or the U.S. sees fit to precipitate a war. . . . To this faction [the warmongers and the military] it seems of small concern that the nations lying between us and Russia would be the most terrible sufferers. . . . 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. . . ."

These quotations give the flavor of an era that is so remote as to make it seem incredible that such views should have dominated the American Right-wing. To the current Right-wing, which has virtually obliterated its own former position from its memory, such views today would be branded, at the very least, as "soft on communism." The radical transformation of the Right-wing can even be seen in the fate of something like the Bricker Amendment. Only a decade ago, the Bricker Amendment was the number-one foreign-policy plank of the Right-wing, dear to all the "little old ladies in tennis shoes" that used to form its mass base. And the reason the resurgent conservative movement, and its political embodiment in the Goldwater movement, have entirely buried the Bricker Amendment is because that Amendment, while defining not the most important or the most idealistic foreign-policy stance, was an expression of the "isolationism," or the fear of the effects of big government upon the individual, that bears no relation to today's new Right.

Much of the Left, however, still writes as if the main trouble with today's Right is its "isolationism," its wish to withdraw from foreign aid or international commitments. Others on the Left claim that the Right's anticommunism is a mere cloak for *laissez-faire* economic views. There could not be a more mistaken analysis of the essence of the current position of the American Right, for that position is virtually the reverse: today's Right-wing is directed, with passion, dedication, and even fanaticism to one overriding goal, to which all other possible goals are totally subordinate. And that goal is the nuclear annihilation of the Soviet Union. Here is the essence of the new Right, the gauge of the totality of its transformation. As one of its major theoreticians likes to put it: "I have a vision, a great vision of the future – a totally devastated Soviet Union." Here, in brief, is the vision that animates the conservative revival.

For the blight that destroyed the libertarianism of the Right-wing and effected its transformation was nothing less than hysterical anticommunism. It began with this kind of reasoning: there are two "threats" to liberty: the "internal" threat of domestic socialism, and the "external" threat of Soviet Russia. The external threat is the most important. *Therefore*, all energies must now be directed to battling and destroying that "threat." In the course of this shift of focus from statism to communism as the "enemy," the Right-wing somehow failed to see that the real "external" threat was not Soviet Russia, but a warlike foreign policy of global intervention, and especially the nuclear weapons of mass destruction used to back up such a policy. And they failed to see that the main architect in organizing a foreign policy of global nuclear intervention was the United States. In short, they failed to see that both the "external" and "internal" threats of statism to liberty were essentially domestic.

Under pressure of anticommunist hysteria, the Right-wing, despite its fondness for quasi-theological or moral cant, has imitated the communists themselves in virtually abandoning all moral principles except one: in this case, the destruction of all opposition, foreign and domestic. For the immorality of communism is not uniquely diabolic; it stems from the fact that for communists, *all other* moral principles are expendable before the overriding end of the maintenance and advance of the communist system. But, the Right-wing has similarly erected as its sole, overriding end the destruction of communists and communist countries, and all other considerations are scrapped to attain that end. There seems now to be one crucial difference, however; the communists are more convinced than ever that nuclear weapons of annihilation make imperative peaceful coexistence between states, and that social change must come about through internal changes within each state, where conflict would be relatively small-scale and confined. But the Right-wing has not only failed to learn this lesson; on the contrary, the more terrible modern weaponry has become, the more fanatically determined upon total war has the Right-wing grown. This seems to be a lunatic position, and undoubtedly it is, but it is important that non-Rightists realize that this is *precisely* the position of the present-day Right.

Now, of course, no one has ever wanted war *per se*; Hitler would not have attacked Soviet Russia, for example, if Russia had agreed to surrender unconditionally without war. And neither would the Right-wing launch an H-bomb attack on Russia if Khrushchev and his government were to resign and turn over the Soviet Union to, let us say, an American army of occupation.

But that is the point: that nothing short of unconditional surrender would satisfy the Right-wing, or would deflect it from nuclear attack. How does the Right-wing justify a position that is *prima facie* monstrous and even crazed? The essential justification is, curiously enough, theological and Christian. It is even Catholic, for while the mass base of the Right-wing, apart from the Eastern cities, is fundamentalist-Protestant, the intellectual leaders are almost all either Catholic or "proto-Catholic." The justification is a willingness to destroy the world, and the human race along with it, for matters of high principle. The highest principle, as we have seen above, is the destruction of communists, who are, at least implicitly and sometimes explicitly, identified with the devil and his agents upon earth. And, after all, what does the destruction of the world matter when men's immortal souls will continue in eternal life? As the leading publicist of the new Right has said: "If I had to 'push the button,' I would push it unswervingly, in the firm knowledge that I am in the right." Those who may balk at this blithe attitude toward world destruction are

accused of being cowards, and *atheistic* cowards at that, for only atheists would cling so adamantly to "mere biological life" when great principle is at stake. (Not being a Catholic, I will have to leave the theological refutation of this position to others; I am surprised, however, to hear that mass suicide and mass murder are looked upon approvingly by the Church.)

Another curious justification is the famous "red or dead" dichotomy. But in fact the stark choice of "red or dead" is just as unrealistic an alternative for America as the old "communist or fascist" choice posed by many of the Left in the 1930's. There is at least one other choice: peaceful coexistence and joint nuclear disarmament. Moreover, choosing death over redness is suicide, and one would have thought that suicide was a grave sin for Christians. And finally this dichotomy allows no reference to the fact that approximately one billion people, now living in communist countries throughout the world, *are* choosing redness every day, by not committing suicide. Is there no lesson here? Does it make any sense, furthermore, to destroy these people, and untold Americans along with them, thus to "liberate" those who have made their own personal choice for redness over death? Is it moral, or Christian, to *change* their choice from life to death by force? In short, is it moral, or Christian, for American conservatives to annihilate millions of Russians, Poles, etc., to "liberate" through murder those who have already made their choice for life?

Also implicit in the Right-wing thesis is the view that the devil is omnipotent; that once communism "takes over," a country, it is doomed, and its population might as well be written off to the eternal abyss. That this is a starkly pessimistic view of mankind is obvious; and this is all the more curious in the light of the demonstrations by libertarian economists that socialism cannot provide a viable economic system for an industrial society. It also studiously ignores the enormous changes that have taken place within communist countries since World War II, the considerable liberalization and even increased emphasis on private enterprise in Russia and many of the countries of eastern Europe.

Communist China's recent expression of concern as to whether Yugoslavia is a socialist country is evidence enough of the alarm felt by communist fundamentalists at the unwilling but headlong retreat from socialism in that communist land. It is also significant that not one Right-wing economist or strategist has taken the trouble to consider the surely important question of how one would de-communize Russia if it should surrender to the American army – now or at any other time? I believe that de-communization could be achieved, and in a way similar to, though much more thoroughgoing than, the path of Yugoslavia; but the point is that the indifference to this problem on the Right is another indication of its central concern: nuclear war. De-communization is to come about, not through a change in the ideas and actions of the Russian and other peoples, but, according to the Right, through their liquidation.

Evidence of the Right-wing subordination of all its other goals and principles to nuclear war against communists is overwhelming, and at every hand. It lies at the root of the obscene eagerness with which the Right hurries to embrace every dictator no matter how fascistic or blood-stained, who affirms his "anti-communism." William F. Buckley's "libertarian" apologia for the fascist regime of South Africa in the pages of *National Review* is a case in point. So is the enormous enthusiasm for Chiang-kai-Shek, for Franco, for Syngman Rhee, and – most recently – for Mme. Nhu. It is not simply that these dictators are welcomed reluctantly, for expediency's

sake in the "war against communism." The Right has proceeded, in its war hysteria, far beyond that point. For now these dictators are *better*, since their policy is evidently far "harder" on communists and suspected communists than the policy of the democracies. Mme. Nhu, as a Catholic as well as a totalitarian, has touched the heart of every Right-wing publicist. There can be nothing "harder" on one's subjects than repressing a religious majority and herding the peasants of the country into concentration camps in order to stave off "communism." The fact that this is hardly a better policy than communism itself makes no imprint whatever on a Right-wing which often likes to boast of itself as a "conservative libertarian" movement. It is tragically ironic and almost incredible that a movement which began, not too many years ago, in a passionate commitment to human liberty, should end as the cheering squad for a Mme. Nhu. Is it really too impolite to wonder how the Right-wing would now regard the man who was, in his day, the "hardest" and the "toughest" anticommunist of them all: Adolf Hitler?

In domestic affairs, the free-market rhetoric has become simply that: after-dinner talk carrying no enthusiasm or true conviction. Indeed, the promise of *laissez-faire* now performs the same function for the new American Right as the promise of unlimited abundance under communism did for Stalin. While enslaving and exploiting the Soviet people, Stalin held out a splendid *future* of utopian abundance that would make current sacrifices worthwhile. The present-day Right holds out the eventual promise of freedom and the free-market *after* communists shall have been exterminated. If there are any survivors emerging from their civil-defense shelters after the holocaust, they will presumably be allowed to engage in free-market activities, provided, of course, that some other "enemy" shall not have raised its head in the meanwhile.

This total subordination of all concerns to anticommunism accounts for all the otherwise inexplicable reversals on the Right. Thus, the Supreme Court is now bitterly attacked for the opposite reasons as in the 1930's: because it *prevents* infringements of the state on the liberties of the person. Justice Frankfurter, once assailed as a virtual advocate of tyranny, is now hailed by the Right for his sound, pragmatic conservatism in not interfering with anticommunist persecutions – the fruits, of course, of the selfsame juridical philosophy. Social Democrats and New Dealers, such as the *New Leader*, Sidney Hook, Senator Dodd, George Meany, and others are embraced for their "hard anticommunism." The *New Leader's* collaboration with the Right-wing in publishing a pro-Chiang propaganda article is indicative of this change in atmosphere, a change that alters all the old categories of "right" and "left" that are still unthinkingly used in political discourse.

It is instructive, finally, to consider the political concerns of Americans for Freedom, virtually the political action arm of *National Review*. To my knowledge, not one political action drive of YAF has been directed to an increase of individual liberty or of the free-market; stressed instead have been such items as perpetuating and strengthening HUAC, calls for blockade – and more – of Cuba, opposition to the test-ban treaty, restoring prayer to the public school, and advocacy of local ordinances and "card-parties" coercively interfering with the right of stores to sell goods from communist countries – hardly a contribution to a free market. I believe there is only one exception to this generalization: an eager enthusiasm for the Mitchell program to reduce relief payments in Newburgh, New York, an enthusiasm that may not have been unrelated to the racial issue involved.

Coterminous with the *political* transformation of the American Right has come a *philosophical* transformation, and I do not believe that the two are unconnected. The latter greatly bolsters and perpetuates the former. The positive positions of the various conservative thinkers vary greatly; but they all unite in determined opposition to human reason, to individual liberty, to separation of church and state, to all the things that characterized the classical liberal position and its modern extension. There is, unfortunately, no space here for a full discussion of the current conservative position: but basically it is a return to the essential principles of early nineteenth century conservatism. We must realize that the great fact of modern history was the classical liberal revolution against the old order, a "revolution" that expressed itself in many forms: *laissez-faire* economics, individual liberty, separation of church-and-state, free trade and international peace, opposition to statism and militarism. Its great embodiments were the three great revolutions of the late eighteenth century: the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution. Each, in its way, was part of the general classical liberal revolution against the old order.

Conservatism emerged, in France, Britain, and elsewhere in Europe, as a conscious reactionary attempt to smash this revolution and to restore the old order even more systematically than it had been installed before. The essence of that order may be summed up in the famous phrase "Throne-and-Altar." In short, the old order consisted of a ruling oligarchy of despotic king and royal bureaucracy, aided by feudal landlords and a state church, Anglican or Gallican. It was an order, as explicated by conservatives, that stressed the over-riding importance of "community" – as embodied in the state, of theocratic union of church and state, of the virtues of nationalism and war, of coerced "morality" and of the denigration of the individual subject. And philosophically, reason was derided in behalf of pure faith in ruling tradition.

At first it might seem that this old conservatism is irrelevant to American conservatism today, but I do not believe this to be true. It is true that an American conservative has difficulty finding a legitimate monarch *in America*. But he does the best he can; the current American Right-wing is, for one thing, highly enamoured of European monarchy, and there is much enthusiasm for restoration of the Hapsburgs. One leading proto-Catholic conservative still toasts "the King over the water," and Frederick Wilhelmsen apparently regards the Crown of St. Stephen as the summit of Western civilization. Russell Kirk, in turn, seems to prefer the Tory squirearchy of Anglican England. At every hand, Metternich, the Stuarts, and the later Burke have replaced libertarians as historical heroes. But a king for the United States is, of course, a bit difficult, and conservatives have had to content themselves with makeshifts: with the restoration to historiographical favor, for example, of such statist as Alexander Hamilton, and of solicitude for the peculiar institution of slavery in the South. Willmoore Kendall has found in Congress the apotheosis of conservatism, and asserts not only the right, but the *duty* of the Greek community to preserve itself from the irritating probing of Socrates. Everywhere on the Right the "open society" is condemned, and a coerced morality affirmed. God is supposed to be put back into government. Free speech is treated with suspicion and distrust, and the military are hailed as the greatest patriots, and conscription strongly upheld. Western imperialism is trumpeted as the proper way to deal with backward peoples, and pilgrimages are made to Franco's Spain for inspiration in governmental forms. And, at every side, reason is denigrated, and faith in tradition and custom held up as the proper path for man.

It is true that most modern conservatives do not, like their forebears, wish to destroy the industrial system and revert to small farms and happy handicraftsmen – although there is a strong strain of even this idea in contemporary conservatism. But, basically, the current conservatives are supremely indifferent to a free-market economy; they do not blanch at the vast economic distortions imposed by arms contracts or at crippling restrictions on foreign trade, and they could not tolerate a budget cut that would reduce America's military posture in the world. In fact, such leading conservatives as Ernest van den Haag and Willmoore Kendall have been frankly Keynesian in economics. In the end, all must be subordinated to the state; as William F. Buckley has affirmed: "Where reconciliation of an individual's and the government's interests cannot be achieved, the interests of the government shall be given exclusive consideration." One observer of the conservative movement has commented, "How's that for *laissez-faire*?" Indeed. Above all, the modern conservative program reduces to dragooning the American people, under the control of the current American version of Throne-and-Altar, into lockstep uniformity and a closed society dedicated to the overriding end of destroying communism, even at the expense of nuclear annihilation.

What of the old libertarian segment of the Right? Largely they have been submerged in the transformation of the Right-wing, generally because they have not had articulate spokesmen explaining to them the nature and magnitude of what has taken place. They have largely been bemused by the pervasive idea that there is, in some strong sense, a joint "conservative-libertarian movement," and that no matter how much conservatives may diverge from liberty, they are the libertarian's natural allies – at the same end of the spectrum, and at the polar opposite from socialism. But this idea suffers from the "cultural lag" that we have observed. The old Right may have been the natural ally of the *laissez-faire* libertarian, but this is not at all true of the new.

The libertarian needs, perhaps most of all, to be informed by history, and to realize that conservatism was always the polar opposite of classical liberalism. Socialism, in contrast, was not the polar opposite of either, but rather, in my view, a muddled and irrationally contradictory mixture of both liberalism and conservatism. For socialism was essentially a movement to come to terms with the industrial revolution, to try to achieve *liberal ends* by the use of collectivistic, *conservative means*. It tried to achieve the ideals of peace, freedom, and a progressing standard of living by using the collectivist, organicist, hierarchical means of conservatism as adapted to industrial society. As a middle-of-the-road doctrine, it is easy for socialism, once it abandoned the liberal ideals of peace and freedom, to shift completely to the conservative pole in the many varying forms of "national socialism."

Mr. Frank S. Meyer, the leading proponent of a fused "conservative-libertarian movement," has called upon us to ignore the nineteenth century, "heir to the disruption of the French Revolution," and to go back beyond "the parochial disputes of the nineteenth century." Such a course would indeed be convenient for Meyer's thesis, as it would sweep away the whole meaning of the liberal and conservative movements. For the point is that both liberalism and conservatism (and socialism as well) found their form and their *doctrine* precisely in the nineteenth century, as a result of the struggles between the old order and the new. It is precisely by focussing on the history of the nineteenth century that we learn of the true origins of the various "isms" of our

day, as well as the illogical and mythical nature of the attempted "conservative-libertarian" fusion.

There are some signs, indeed, that from various sides, thinkers are beginning to apprehend the dissolution of the old forms, the obsolescence of the old "left" and "right" stereotypes in American politics, and the invalidity of a fusion of libertarians with an old conservatism *redivivus*. Libertarians are beginning to protest; in the pages of *New Individualist Review*, the outstanding student journal of the Right, Ronald Hamowy, one of its editors-in-chief, has, in a well-known article, bitterly attacked the conservative philosophy and politics of Buckley and *National Review*. Dean Benjamin Rogge of Wabash College has contributed a thoughtful critique of the new conservatism, and Howard Buffett has called for an end to conscription. But *New Individualist Review* was basically founded in commitment to the conservative-libertarian mythos, and it clearly suffers from being mired in this inner contradiction. Robert LeFevre, head of the libertarian Freedom School, in a trenchant leaflet, *Those Who Protest*, has pointed out and attacked the transformation of the Right-wing. And from a different direction, the noted critic Edmund Wilson has now raised his powerful voice to protest both *The Cold War and the Income Tax*. Perhaps indeed, the country is ripe for a fundamental ideological realignment.

Murray N. Rothbard (1926–1995) was the author of Man, Economy, and State, Conceived in Liberty, What Has Government Done to Our Money, The Case Against the Fed, and many other books and articles. He was also the editor – with Lew Rockwell – of The Rothbard-Rockwell Report.