

The General Line

A new journal of opinion must justify its existence; our justification is a deep commitment to the liberty of man. Our aim is to present articles that embody scholarship; but not a scholarship random, unfocussed, or devoted to minute examination of trivia. Ours will be a scholarship finely honed for use as a weapon in expanding, deepening, and refining the knowledge of and commitment to liberty in all its critical aspects and ramifications. It will cut across the insularity of disciplines. Above all, it will not remain on the level of glittering generalities, for anyone can pay lip-service to liberty if it entails no specific consequences in policy or action. General principles remain cloudy verbiage if they are not made systematic and applied to specific problems; and responses to such problems must stay hopelessly confused if they remain ad hoc and unsubsumed under guiding principle. This journal proposes to advance the integration of the general and the specific, the unity of the theory and practice of liberty. While each contributor is of course solely responsible for articles under his name, and we do not expect to agree with every point in every article, we intend each article to be fully consistent with our aims.

Liberty, then, is our thesis; reason shall be our method. Only reason can build a valid and consistent ideology, and only reason can strip unsparingly the veil of custom and habit and myth from dominant ideas and institutions and hold them up to the harsh light of truth. That reason is cold, impersonal and unconcerned is a widespread myth; indeed, nothing is stronger than reason for redoubling one's passionate commitment and devotion to the cause of truth.

Our title, Left and Right, reflects our concerns in several ways. It reveals our editorial concern with the ideological; and it also highlights our conviction that the present-day categories of "left" and "right" have become misleading and obsolete, and that the doctrine of liberty contains elements corresponding with both contemporary left and right. This means in no sense that we are middle-of-the-roads, eclectically trying to combine, or step between, both poles; but rather that a consistent view of liberty includes concepts that have also become part of the rhetoric or program of right and of left. Hence a creative approach to liberty must transcend the confines of contemporary political shibboleths.

There is a ferment abrewing in America, and the smug apathy of the 1950's is now virtually forgotten. And yet conservative and profoundly anti-intellectual views born amidst that apathy, linger on to hamper innovations of thought and action. Such view, for example, that an end has been put to ideology, and that doctrine and ideology can no longer have an impact on American life. The upsurge of new forms of ideology and activism since the end of the 'fifties has been increasingly refuting this counsel of passivity. Out of its confrontation with harsh reality, this new ferment has instinctively spurned the old and faulty categories; it sees that the old doctrines and the old leaders have led the world astray. This upsurge needs to develop an ideology which will be consistent with its keen insight into the realities of our time. Hopefully, the new dimensions of Left and Right's creative thought will contribute substance and rigor to this decisive awakening.