

**THE
AGONY
OF THE
AMERICAN
LEFT**

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A critical study of American radicalism since the 1920's, from the early successes of the Old Left and its subsequent defense of the status quo, to the failure of the new activists — black and white — to convert protest into programs.

free, but it has purged itself of ideas. The literary intellectuals are free, but they use their freedom to propagandize for the state.

The freedom of American intellectuals as a professional class blinds them to their un-freedom. It leads them to confuse the political interests of intellectuals as an official minority with the progress of intellect. Their freedom from overt political control (particularly from "vigilantes") blinds them to the way in which the "knowledge industry" has been incorporated into the state and the military-industrial complex. Since the state exerts so little censorship over the cultural enterprises it subsidizes—since on the contrary it supports basic research, congresses for cultural freedom, and various liberal organizations—intellectuals do not see that these activities serve the interests of the state, not the interests of intellect. All they can see is the absence of external censorship; that and that alone proves to their satisfaction that Soviet intellectuals are slaves and American intellectuals free men. Meanwhile their own self-censorship makes them eligible for the official recognition and support that sustain the illusion that the American government, unlike the Soviet government, greatly values the life of the mind. The circle of illusion is thus complete; and even the revelation that the campaign for "cultural freedom" was itself the creation and tool of the state has not yet torn away the veil.

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That there is no necessary contradiction between the interests of organized intellectuals and the interests of American world power, that the intellectual community can be trusted to police itself and should be left free from annoying

pressures from outside, that dissenting opinion within the framework of agreement on cold-war fundamentals not only should be tolerated but can be turned to effective propaganda use abroad—all these things were apparent in the early fifties to the more enlightened members of the governmental bureaucracy; but they were far from being universally acknowledged even in the bureaucracy, much less in Congress or in the country as a whole. "Back in the early 1950's," says Thomas W. Braden, the man who supervised the cultural activities of the CIA, "... the idea that Congress would have approved many of our projects was about as likely as the John Birch Society's approving Medicare."⁹ There was resistance to these projects in the CIA itself. To a man of Braden's background and inclinations the idea of supporting liberal and socialist "fronts" grew naturally out of the logic of the cold war. During the Second World War Braden served with the OSS—next to the communist movement itself the most fruitful source, it would appear, of postwar anticommunism (the same people often having served in both). Before joining the CIA in 1950, Braden taught English at Dartmouth and served for two years as executive secretary of the Museum of Modern Art; later he became president of the California Board of Education, where he defended a liberal view of academic freedom against those who wished to ban J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* from school libraries. Braden was a new type of bureaucrat, equally at home in government and in academic circles; but when in 1950 he proposed that "the CIA ought to take on the Russians by penetrating a battery of international fronts," his

⁹ Thomas W. Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" *Saturday Evening Post*, May 20, 1967, p. 10. On Braden see *The New York Times*, May 8, 1967.

more conventional colleagues made the quaint objection that "this is just another one of those goddamned proposals for getting into everybody's hair." Allan Dulles intervened to save the project after it had been voted down by the division chiefs. "Thus began the first centralized effort to combat Communist fronts."¹

Before they had finished, the directors of the CIA had infiltrated the National Student Association, the Institute of International Labor Research, the American Newspaper Guild, the American Friends of the Middle East, the National Council of Churches, and many other worthy organizations.² "We . . . placed one agent in a Europe-based organization of intellectuals called the Congress for Cultural Freedom," Braden notes.³ This "agent" was Michael Josselson, who was born in Russia in 1908, educated in Germany, represented American department stores in Paris in the mid-thirties, came to the United States just before the war, and was naturalized in 1941. During the war Josselson, like Braden, served in the OSS. Afterwards he was sent to Berlin as an officer for cultural affairs in Patton's army. There he met Melvin J. Lasky. When they organized the Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1950, Josselson became its executive director.⁴

¹ Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" p. 12.

² On the CIA's cultural activities see *The New York Times*, April 27, 1966; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 19, 1967; *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 14, 15, 22, 23, 30, 1967; *Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 1967; Andrew Kopkind: "CIA: The Great Corrupter," *New Statesman*, February 24, 1967, pp. 249-50; Jason Epstein: "The CIA and the Intellectuals," *New York Review of Books*, April 20, 1967, pp. 16-21; Sol Stern: "A Short Account of International Student Politics & the Cold War," *Ramparts*, March 1967, pp. 29-38.

³ Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" p. 12.

⁴ *The New York Times*, May 15, 1967.

"Another agent became an editor of *Encounter*."⁵ The usefulness of these agents, Braden comments, was that they "could not only propose anti-Communist programs to the official leaders of the organizations but they could also suggest ways and means to solve the inevitable budgetary problems. Why not see if the needed money could be obtained from 'American foundations'?"⁶ Note that he does not describe the role of the CIA as having been restricted to financing these fronts; its agents were also to promote "anti-Communist programs." When it became public that the Congress for Cultural Freedom had been financed for sixteen years by the CIA, the editors of *Encounter* made a great point of the fact that the congress had never dictated policy to the magazine; but the whole question takes on a different color in light of Braden's disclosure that one of the editors worked for the CIA. Under these circumstances, it was unnecessary for the congress to dictate policy to *Encounter*; nor would the other editors, ignorant of these connections, have been aware of any direct intervention by the CIA.

⁵ Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" p. 12. "Braden's allegation was untrue," Melvin J. Lasky contends. (*The Nation*, October 2, 1967, p. 309.) In a subsequent statement, he argues, Braden "in effect withdrew" his allegation when he explained that "by an 'agent,' in Lasky's words, 'he also meant 'unwitting' persons." The article to which Lasky refers (*The New York Times*, May 8, 1967) reads: "Mr. Braden refused to name the CIA 'agents' in the congress or the magazine, nor would he describe what kind of agents he meant. The agency, he said, used the term 'agent' to describe both 'witting' and 'unwitting' operatives. But the article in *The Saturday Evening Post* clearly implies that the persons involved were 'agents' before they were 'placed' in the congress and 'became an editor' of *Encounter*." I see nothing in this report that entitles the reader to conclude that Braden "in effect withdrew" his earlier statement.

⁶ Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" p. 12.

On April 27, 1966, *The New York Times*, in a long article on the CIA, reported that the CIA had supported the Congress for Cultural Freedom and other organizations through a system of dummy foundations, and that *Encounter* magazine . . . was for a long time—though it is now—one of the indirect beneficiaries of C.I.A. funds.⁷ (Rumors to this effect had circulated for years.) The editors of *Encounter*—Stephen Spender, Lasky, and Irving Kristol—wrote an extremely disingenuous letter to the *Times* in which they tried to refute the assertion without denying it outright.⁸ They asserted—what was a half-truth at best—that the congress's funds “were derived from various recognized foundations—all of them (from such institutions as the Ford and Rockefeller foundations to the smaller ones) publicly listed in the official directories.”⁸ What was not publicly listed, of course, was the fact that some of these “smaller ones” received money from the CIA for the express purpose of supporting the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Thus between 1961 and 1966, the CIA through some of its phony foundations gave \$430,700 to the Hoblitzelle Foundation, a philanthropical enterprise established by the Dallas millionaire Karl Hoblitzelle, and the Hoblitzelle Foundation obligingly passed along these funds to the Congress for Cultural Freedom.⁹ Needless to say, no hint of these transactions appeared in the Lasky-Spender-Kristol letter to the *Times*.

Privately, Lasky went much further and declared cate-

⁷ Spender, Kristol, and Frank Kermode all insist that they knew nothing of *Encounter's* relations with the CIA until the matter became public, Lasky having assured them that there was nothing to the persistent rumors they had heard.

⁸ *The New York Times*, May 10, 1966.

⁹ *Ibid.*, February 19, March 10, May 10, 1967; *Newsweek*, March 6, 1967, p. 31.

gorically that *Encounter* had never received funds from the CIA. (Later he admitted that he had been “insufficiently frank” with his colleagues and friends.¹) In public, however, the magazine's defense was conducted in language of deliberate ambiguity. Another letter to the *Times*, signed by John Kenneth Galbraith, George Kennan, Robert Oppenheimer, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., completely avoided the question of *Encounter's* financing and argued merely that the magazine's editorial independence proved that it had never been “used” by the CIA—a statement, however, which carried with it the implication that the CIA had had nothing to do with the organization at all.² One must ask why these men felt it necessary to make such a guarded statement, and why, since they had to state their position so cautiously, they felt it necessary to make any statement at all. The matter is even more puzzling in view of Galbraith's statement in the *New York World Journal Tribune* that “some years ago,” while attending a meeting of the congress in Berlin (he probably refers to a conference held there in 1960), he had been told by a “knowledgeable friend” that the Congress for Cultural Freedom might be receiving support from the CIA. Galbraith says that he “subjected its treasurer to interrogation and found that the poor fellow had been trained in ambiguity but not dissemblance.” “I was disturbed,” he says, “and I don't think I would have attended any more meetings” if his entrance into government service had not ended his participation.³ In another interview Galbraith told Ivan Yates of the London *Observer* that he “made a mental note to attend no more meetings of the Congress.” Yates asked “how in that case he

¹ *The New York Times*, May 9, 1967.

² *Ibid.*, May 9, 1966.

³ *New York World Journal Tribune*, March 13, 1967.