

**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.

mitted were "without justification," and agreed to pay his legal expenses.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout this controversy, the editors of *Encounter* repeatedly pointed to their editorial independence, first in order to deny (by implication) any connection with the CIA, and then when it was impossible any longer to deny that, in order to prove that the CIA, although supporting the magazine, had not tried to dictate its editorial policy—or in Josselson's words, that the money had "never, never" been used "for propaganda and intelligence purposes."<sup>8</sup> Spender, Kristol, and Lasky, in their letter to the *Times*, claimed that "we are our own masters and are part of nobody's propaganda."<sup>9</sup> The letter signed by Galbraith and Schlesinger declared that *Encounter* maintained "no loyalty except an unswerving commitment to cultural freedom" and that it had "freely criticized actions and policies of all nations, including the United States."<sup>1</sup> These statements, however, need to be set against Thomas Braden's account of the rules that guided the international organization of the CIA: "Use legitimate, existing organizations; disguise the extent of American interest; protect the integrity of the organization by not requiring it to support every aspect of official American policy."<sup>2</sup>

These rules do more than shed light on the nature and extent of *Encounter's* editorial freedom. By publishing them at a time when they must surely have embarrassed the writers concerned, Braden revealed a contempt for their intellectual which the officers of the CIA could not conceal. Whatever the intellectuals may have thought of the relation-

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Werth: "Literary Bay of Pigs," p. 711.

<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times*, May 10, 1966.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., May 9, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA is 'Immoral,'" p. 14.

ship, the CIA regarded them exactly as the Communist party regarded its fronts in the thirties and forties—as instruments of its own purpose.<sup>3</sup> Most of the beneficiaries of the CIA have been understandably slow to see this point; it is hard to admit that one has been used and that one's sense of freedom and power is an illusion. Norman Thomas, for instance, admits that he should have known where the money for his Institute of International Labor Relations was coming from, but (like Galbraith, like Thomas Braden himself) what he chiefly regrets is that a worthwhile work has had to come prematurely to an end. The Kaplan Fund, Thomas insists, "never interfered in any way"—which merely means that he was never aware of its interference.<sup>4</sup> He does not see that he was being used, as Stephen Spender puts it in his own case, "for quite different purposes" from the ones he thought he was advancing.<sup>5</sup> *He* thought he was working for democratic reform in Latin America, whereas the CIA valued him as a showpiece, an anticommunist who happened to be a socialist.<sup>6</sup>

Spender has had the wit to recognize the situation for what it was. "In reality," he writes, the intellectuals employed by the CIA without their knowledge were "being

<sup>3</sup> "The CIA experience, for most of my friends who engaged in it directly, was, I suspect, very like what the experience of being a Communist must have been for many other Americans." Murray Kempton in *Commentary*, September 1967, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *The New York Times*, February 22, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., March 27, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Braden is under the impression that this combination was almost irresistible to Europeans, at whom the CIA's cultural program was directed. "The fact, of course, is that in much of Europe in the 1950's, socialists, people who called themselves 'left'—the very people whom many Americans thought no better than Communists—were the only people who gave a damn about fighting Communism." Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" p. 10.

used for concealed government propaganda." Spencer admits that this arrangement made a "mockery" of intellectual freedom.<sup>7</sup> Michael Wood, formerly of the NSA, has written even more poignantly of his relations with the world of power. "Those of us who worked for NSA during 1965-1966, experienced an unusual sense of personal liberation. While actively involved in many of the insurgent campus and political movements of the day, we were also able to move freely through the highest echelons of established power." These experiences, Wood says, "gave us a heady feeling and a sense of power beyond our years." But "to learn that it had been bought with so terrible a compromise made me realize how impotent we really were."<sup>8</sup>

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What conclusions can be drawn from the history of the cultural cold war? Some should be obvious. Thanks to the revelations of the CIA's secret subsidies, it is no longer a very novel or startling proposition to say that American officials have committed themselves to fighting fire with fire, and that this strategy is self-defeating because the means corrupt the end. "In our attempts to fight unscrupulous opponents," asks Arthur J. Moore in *Christianity and Crisis*, "have we ended up debauching ourselves?"<sup>9</sup> The history of the cold war makes it clear that the question can only be answered with an emphatic affirmative.

These events, if people consider them seriously and try to confront their implications without flinching, will lead

<sup>7</sup> *The New York Times*, March 27, 1967.

<sup>8</sup> *Ramparts*, March 1967, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Christianity and Crisis*, May 29, 1967, p. 117.

many Americans to question (perhaps for the first time) the cant about American "pluralism," the "open society," etc. Andrew Kopkind puts it very well: "The illusion of dissent was maintained: the CIA supported Socialist cold warriors, Fascist cold warriors, black and white cold warriors. . . . But it was a sham pluralism, and it was utterly corrupting."<sup>1</sup> A society which tolerates an illusory dissent is in much greater danger, in some respects, than a society in which uniformity is ruthlessly imposed.

For twenty years Americans have been told that their country is an open society and that communist peoples live in slavery. Now it appears that the very men who were most active in spreading this gospel were themselves the servants ("witty" in some cases, unsuspecting in others) of the secret police. The whole show—the youth congresses, the cultural congresses, the trips abroad, the great glamorous display of American freedom and American civilization and the American standard of living—was all arranged behind the scenes by men who believed, with Thomas Braden, that "the cold war was and is a war, fought with ideas instead of bombs."<sup>2</sup> Men who have never been able to conceive of ideas as anything but instruments of national power were the sponsors of "cultural freedom."

The revelations about the intellectuals and the CIA should also make it easier to understand a point about the relation of intellectuals to power that has been widely misunderstood. In associating themselves with the war-making and propaganda machinery of the state in the hope of influencing it, intellectuals deprive themselves of the real influence they could have as men who refuse to judge the validity of ideas by the requirements of national power or any

<sup>1</sup> *New Statesman*, February 24, 1967, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> Braden: "I'm Glad the CIA Is 'Immoral,'" p. 14.