

Correspondence

Henry Wallace

To the Editor: Joseph Capalbo's review of my book, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century; Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941-1948*, in the June, 1974, issue of *Worldview* omits important qualifying statements in my analysis, and as a result simplifies and exaggerates my treatment of both liberalism and Wallace. While, for example, I criticize liberalism and Wallace from a socialist perspective, Capalbo's contention (which he implies I ignore) that "the struggle of the late 1940's was to define what liberalism meant" is a major thesis of my book, and one that I work out at great length in chapters 6-8. Secondly, I argue that social liberalism (as against the corporate variety) failed on its own terms, not in regard to any ideal socialist standard. Thus I contend that the New Deal did not overcome the Depression short of war, and that the national political majority that the New Deal created was, with the institutionalization of the war economy, channeled into narrow interest group politics and conservative trade unionism.

Wallace, I maintain (and this holds for his supporters), "had the courage of his very contradictory convictions and fought [in the early postwar period] against men who offered the nation something far worse." My major points are that the inner contradictions within the varieties of American liberalism, Wallace's own substantial flaws as a political leader, the objective conditions within the domestic political arena, and above all the effects of the war upon American capitalism made it virtually impossible for Wallace and the groups that supported him for peace and reform to make an effective struggle against the cold war and the national anti-Communist consensus.

Furthermore, Capalbo's argument

that "to lump Wallace and Truman together because they were not socialists does a disservice to Wallace" would be true if I really did that. Rather, one of my major theses is that the "Century of the Common Man" program that Wallace advocated during and after the war was "fundamentally different" from the "American Century" program of imperialist expansion and domestic reaction that largely triumphed under Truman. (I also, at some length, contrast the difference between Roosevelt and Truman.) In a footnote that has been widely quoted in reviews I state that "Wallace's commitment to capitalism as a system made him ultimately ineffective. To say that it made him indistinguishable from those who crushed him is to make a mockery of history."

Actually, most of the points Capalbo makes in defense of Wallace and in criticism of Truman (the role of "personality," the blunderings of Truman and his cronies, the definitions of social and corporate liberalism) are made in my book. Capalbo's comment, therefore, that "Whatever disappointment the Left has with liberals or liberalism, it is also a disappointment with America and Americans" I find both insulting and incredible. America is neither liberalism nor capitalism. To say that its culture and its people are completely indistinguishable from its economic system and its ruling class is, I believe, to take a very superficial view of history.

Capalbo concludes that "Henry Wallace is depicted by Markowitz as a deluded liberal who, by the end of his life, became a sad and pathetic figure recanting all he had earlier believed." While this is true to a considerable extent, I also argue that there was and is much that is vital in the "Century of the Common Man" program that Wallace articulated in the 1940's. But in spite of the contemporary atmosphere of détente, I doubt that it can be achieved within the context of present-day American capitalism or through the development of the largely utopian "progressive capitalism" that Wallace envisaged. Rather,

I think that its future (if it is to have one) lies in the struggle for socialism in America, in the union of "incremental" reforms with the development of economic and political power within America's diverse working class. To say that, however, is not to denigrate Wallace or the struggle he made, but rather to understand its limitations. Eventually, I believe, Wallace may come to be seen as a kind of American Robert Owen, possessed of great strengths and great flaws, and worthy of critical respect from all those who would build an egalitarian and cooperative society in America.

Norman Markowitz

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On the Matter of Sir Herbert's Anarchism

To the Editors: I belatedly came across a review by Benjamin Barber of Sir Herbert Read's *Anarchy and Order* in the March, 1972, edition of *Worldview*. The inaccuracy of the review, and Mr. Barber's distorted presentation of Sir Herbert's thought, compel me to respond, albeit briefly, in an attempt to defend this man, the neglect of whose anarchist philosophy is partly due to unfavorable treatment by critics such as Mr. Barber. I do hope that the following will serve both to indicate the viability of Sir Herbert's anarchism and to point out Mr. Barber's failure to portray the thrust of Read's social thought properly.

1. To begin with, let one fact be set straight. *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* was published by Faber and Faber in 1954 and by Beacon Press, with Howard Zinn's introduction, in 1971. Neither of these publishing dates is seventeen years after the author's death, as Mr. Barber states, for Sir Herbert died in the summer of 1968.

2. Mr. Barber claims that Read's pacifism is of little relevance to the rabidly ideological total wars of recent times, and that because Read's

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vigorous role as the exponent of revolutionary nonviolent love. What may be lacking in the sharpness of Brown's critique is more than made up for by his sympathy in understanding the internal logic of opposing viewpoints.

Christian Asceticism by J. A. Ziesler

(Eerdmans; 118 pp.; \$2.25 [paper])

In view of the resource limitations of the planet, there has been in recent years a good deal of discussion about reviving asceticism. For those unfamiliar with the ascetical tradition in Christianity this little paperback might be a good place to begin thinking about some of the ambiguities and very practical possibilities in discovering that less can be more.

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position is argued from the perspective of World War I it carries little pertinence or plausibility. Read's point of view is characterized as "archaic." It should be noted, contrary to the impression left by Mr. Barber, that all but one of the six essays that comprise the text were written subsequent to the outbreak of the Second World War. However, the date of authorship is not under dispute, but rather the continuing relevancy of the substance of Read's work. The closing essay, "Chains of Freedom," perhaps the most speculative of all Sir Herbert's political writings, touches upon virtually every major theme that has been with social philosophy since Plato, and Read's social criticism is as strong here as anywhere. He foreshadows and paraphrases the contemporary criticism of Herbert Marcuse when he writes that "the most mentally enslaved people in the world today are the *uniform* citizens of a democratic republic like America."

3. Mr. Barber misrepresents a very key aspect of Read's anarchism in stating that Read is attracted to anarchism "precisely because he as-

sumes that men are naturally communal," and that Read "takes a view of human nature so benign and promising as to make evil and suffering seem impossible except as products of accidents or ignorance." On page 43 of *Anarchy and Order* Read explicitly states that his anarchism is not based on an assumption of the natural goodness of human nature. Read's anarchism is founded upon a certain view of the natural world and of man's relationship to the natural world—two central concerns of Read's which Barber does not discuss.

4. Mr. Barber, perhaps partly due to an ignorance of Read's total corpus, misconstrues Sir Herbert's concern with the relation of art to society. *Anarchy and Order* is said to constitute an attempt to integrate the artist and society, which, according to Mr. Barber, would result in the perversion of both. But this is not Sir Herbert's concern. His concern is to make evident the need for a social ordering which does not conflict with individual sensibilities. In his autobiographical work, *The Contrary Experience*, Read said: "Anarchism asserts—it is its only assertion—that life must be so ordered that the individual can live a natural life, 'attending to what is within' . . ." Read does not primarily seek "artistic freedom," as Mr. Barber says, but human freedom. And the role which art plays in human freedom—the theme which synthesizes Read's diverse writings—is not touched upon by Mr. Barber.

5. Finally, Mr. Barber attempts to liken Sir Herbert's anarchism to liberalism in the respect that they both equate politics with power, and power with evil. But whereas the liberal accepts the necessity of politics and tries to minimize the abuse of power, the anarchist wants to do away with politics and thereby with power. What Mr. Barber is getting at is that Read's anarchism is a stubborn liberalism carried to a point of extremity and coupled with a more optimistic view of man. This is an inaccurate assessment of Read's anarchism, as it is an inaccurate assessment of anarchism in general.

(A survey-type essay by William D. Reichert is helpful on this point. See *Ethics*, January, 1969.) The inaccuracy of Mr. Barber's account can be seen if attention is given, not to the way in which Sir Herbert's attitude toward political power is a variation of the liberal position, but to the underlying consideration which Read gives to man's relationship with nature. The problem of individual liberty, the solution to which finds liberalism ushering in one theory of government or another, is of secondary importance to Read. The more fundamental problem has to do with individual aesthetic sensibilities. It is Read's awareness of this problem that leads him, in "Poetry and Anarchism," to equate our lack of aesthetic sense with our lack of social freedom, and the cause of the arts with the cause of revolution.

While desiring to wholly renounce Mr. Barber's treatment of Sir Herbert, I would not wish to boost Read onto a pedestal of irreproachability. Sir Herbert certainly has his weak points: His reliance on organic metaphors is the most obvious, but his critique of Marxism by way of Russian communism is also very troubling. *Anarchy and Order* is an indelibly marked product of the mid-twentieth century, yet one of the critic's tasks should be to extract what is of lasting value in a work. Mr. Barber fails to do this, and, what is worse, he leads one to believe that there is little of lasting value in Read's work to be extracted.

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Mr. Barber originally wrote: "No one ought then to be surprised to discover that Read's Essays in Politics (published here for the first time under the title Anarchy and Order, seventeen years after their original English publication and three years after the author's death). . . ." A line dropped out of the galleys as we went to press. Our apologies to Mr. Barber—and to Mr. Waters, who was misled by the printer's error.

—The Editors