

ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

NINETEEN FIFTY

A Survey of Politico-Cultural Trends of the Year

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A Survey of Politico-Cultural Trends of the Year

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I

The year 1950 was culturally undistinguished and politically troubled. It was disturbed by disorders in sixteen countries,¹ involved in acute border disputes in six crucial areas,² and was without the compensation of even the thin but steady stream of human achievement in the sciences, the arts and ideas which had marked the previous year. Moreover, it was overshadowed by a peril of far greater magnitude – the fear, suddenly grown concrete, of the outbreak of a new world war less than five years after the end of the last great cataclysm.

The nuclear physicist Leo Szillard calculated that within ten to fifteen years all human life on the earth might be extinguished by hydrogen bombs. This kind of speculation, the effect of which in previous years was to induce feelings, not only of anxiety, but also of guilt on the part of those who considered themselves responsible – in the first place physicists and politicians – now provoked a desire for self-preservation, if need be by resistance to possible enemies: a combination of terror and resolution, rather than further self-examination or self-condemnation.

The event for which the year 1950 was likely to be most vividly remembered was the outbreak of war in Korea on 25 June, when for the first time the two great systems which between them divided the civilised world finally met in open conflict. This was merely a formal climax of the most crucial development of our times; but the tension between the Communist and non-Communist parts of the world mounted with particular rapidity,

¹ Bolivia, Eritrea, France, Greece, Gold Coast, Indochina, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Guatemala, Kashmir, Malaya, Nepal, Iran (Persia), Puerto Rico, the Philippines, South Africa.

² Berlin, China, Cominform (Tito: Yugoslavia), Jerusalem, Trieste, Saar.

with symptoms which were observable in every region of human experience.

It was not an unconscious process. The fact that the twentieth century had reached its midmost point stimulated much self-conscious reflection about the path which mankind had traversed since its early years. Obvious comparisons were made, in almost every country which possessed a free press, with the relatively deep peace in which the century seemed to open, and even more with that now almost fabulous time – the years of the middle nineteenth century in the European continent. It was an occasion for many sardonic analogies between the overflowing optimism and pride of the 1850s and our own time, with its sad prophecies about the human future, reflecting the disenchantment which unceasing material progress, with its apparently inevitable accompaniment of uncontrollable chaos and destruction, had brought to the West.

These melancholy summaries no longer possessed that note of tranquil sadness, tinged with gently nostalgic feeling, which permeated both life and letters in quieter times. The previous year, 1949, so far as literature, for example, was concerned, to some degree took refuge in 'escapist' reminiscences of the solid security of Victorianism and earlier periods. By 1950 the danger, not merely of war, but of total atomisation of peaceful populations by the newly discovered weapons of unheard of destructive power, had come too close to permit of even the limited comfort of pleasant daydreams of this kind. The desire to avoid facing the painful facts, which had been responsible for the partial return, in Western Europe at any rate, to purely 'aesthetic' poetry and painting, to imaginative writing preoccupied by the problems of private life, to mordant but light social satire, to memoirs and biographies in which fastidious elegance and a desire to please were more evident than deep moral or political concern – this general trend, while it overflowed to some degree into 1950, was no longer characteristic of that year. The mild, sober, pensive mood of the post-Second World War years began to give way to the anxiety and at times acute depression of what seemed a new pre-war (rather than post-war) period; while there was no discernible hysteria in the countries of the West, they appeared to be permeated by a kind of grim expectation of a new debacle; this feeling was not fatalistic, disaster might still be averted, there was

no reason for resignation or despair. Nevertheless, the daily news given by the press and radio acquired a new and menacing urgency, and this was duly reflected in literature and the arts as well as the more obvious social and political manifestations of these months.

The output of books reflecting this preoccupation increased noticeably; the confessions of disillusioned ex-[xxiii] Communists (of which the most notable was the collection of essays by many hands entitled *The God That Failed*) no longer served merely to entertain or excite a public avid for sensational revelations or hair-raising 'inside stories' as such, but directly affected readers to whom the energetic conspirators from whose midst came these eloquent 'renegades' still appeared as a very real and immediate menace. James Burnham, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Louis Fischer and Douglas Hyde were no longer merely repentant sinners or subjects of thrilling psychological autobiographies, but respected experts and daily guides to action. The kulturkampf began in real earnest, with great embitterment on both sides and no quarter given.

II

Politically, the most important single aspect of this was the reluctant but for the most part final recognition by the majority of the thinking inhabitants of Western Europe and the Americas (although not of Asia or Africa) that there were in fact two worlds; that the differences in the political spectrum were not graduated but broke sharply at the frontier marked by the so-called 'iron curtain'; that however deeply men of liberal convictions might abhor the cruelties and injustices of the semi-capitalist system under which they lived, there was more that was common to them and their moderate right-wing opponents than between them and the rulers of Communist Russia and the police democracies. The destruction of the old 'Popular Front' solidarity of all left-wing groups against embattled reaction was a very painful disillusionment to large sections of progressive opinion. But this process, begun by Andrey Vishinsky's brutally direct speeches before various forums of the United Nations, continued by other Soviet spokesmen, and brought home by the suppression of civil liberties in one Communist state after the other, did finally begin to achieve the result of isolating Communists as a *sui generis*

totalitarian group with ideals in absolute conflict with those of liberals and democrats of every shade and hue, a conflict no less violent and irreconcilable than that with fascists or ultramontane Catholics.

It was in this atmosphere that the Western powers were enabled to make a serious effort to achieve the limited objectives of the Atlantic pact – a move of self-defence against possible Soviet aggression; and arrangements for making possible a united military and economic strategy (which later in the year led to the appointment of General Dwight D. Eisenhower as commander-in-chief of the united Western European forces) obtained a degree of general support in the West scarcely possible a year or two before, when such steps would have been denounced vehemently by a good many persons and bodies in no political sympathy with Communism. Every Western country now feared armed aggression and intervention by members of the Soviet bloc, and there was less liability to illusion (although it was by no means wholly absent) either about the consequences of this, or about the possibility of remaining neutral and untouched.

The Communists, on their side, were plainly not unaware of the shift in opinion; they realised the consequent disadvantage to the Soviet Union, and took appropriate steps. They intensified production, particularly of war material, in the Sovietised part of the world and took increasingly drastic steps to insulate their populations even more hermetically by continuing the violent campaigns against foreigners and foreign civilisations, and by reducing contacts with them to the level of the Muscovy of Ivan and Terrible. At the same time it became plain to them that propaganda about the immense achievements of Soviet culture was no longer proving as effective in the West as it had been, and, indeed, tended to cover its agents with ridicule; consequently, strictly political and cultural issues were played down, and a universal appeal was made for peace. Hundreds of thousands of signatures, mainly in central and eastern Europe, were obtained for a document, drafted in Stockholm, which carefully omitted controversial political issues and concentrated upon the worldwide yearning to avoid another war. The Stockholm Peace Petition was much the most successful piece of propaganda achieved by the Soviet Union for many months, and to some degree the painful effect caused by its particularly harsh recent persecution of all

intellectuals and artists who saw any good in any aspect of Western civilisation, as well as by its openly aggressive policies in Asia. The most prominent countermove to this Communist campaign was made by the Roman Catholic Church, which, by giving great publicity to the Holy Year and to the ensuing pilgrimage to Rome, further attracted attention with the promulgation by the Pope of the new dogma of the Bodily Assumption of the Virgin.

III

Thus 1950 was a year in which the general stiffening of the fronts had begun. The Roman Church formally denounced not merely association with Communism in any form, but other intellectual heresies as well, such as idealism, pragmatism, existentialism and so on, which had begun to creep into the fold in spurious disguises. A major battle had begun. In the US, anti-Communist feeling had reached a new height. A bill had passed both houses of Congress requiring Communists and 'fellow travellers' to register themselves with the newly set up agency for counteracting subversive activities, and a new immigration law (passed over the president's veto) was enacted whereby anyone who belonged, or had ever belonged, to a totalitarian community, whether of the left or the right, whether past or present, found it difficult, if not impossible to enter the US. The sense of present danger was increased not merely by the disturbing news of the growth of Communist power, particularly in Asia, but by such local events as the celebrated trial of Alger Hiss (who had been condemned for perjury in denying that he had, twelve years before, given [xxiv] confidential government documents to a Soviet spy), which culminated in his sentence to a term of imprisonment. This was accompanied and followed by the trials and convictions of lesser figures for similar offences, in particular of scientists, some of whom by their own admissions had given the Soviet Union secrets connected with atomic research. Of these the case of Klaus Fuchs, engaged upon secret work of this kind in England, who made a full confession, was perhaps the most notorious; not long after this an Italian physicist, Bruno Pontecorvo, disappeared under mysterious circumstances, it was supposed to the Soviet Union.

The notion that Communist parties abroad were in effect not political organisations so much as networks of espionage began to be established in the public mind. In this atmosphere a group of

US politicians led by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy declared that US government agencies, and in particular the State Department, were riddled with Communists and their sympathisers, who acted as foreign agents and spies. In particular they maintained that many homosexuals, who were open for this reason to blackmail by Soviet agents, infested US government departments and were a source of grave weakness to them. Senator McCarthy and his friends demanded a thoroughgoing purge of such persons. Departmental inquiries were duly held, followed by some dismissals, but this did not satisfy the accusers. Dean Acheson, the US Secretary of State, was attacked for conducting a vacillating foreign policy which discouraged such natural allies of the US as Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and General Francisco Franco, and gave heart to their left-wing opponents. Acheson's dismissal began to be steadily demanded. President Harry S. Truman defended his Secretary of State. The Tydings Committee cleared the accused State Department of most of the charges flung at its members. But the charge of Communist permeation had made a very deep impression upon the public imagination of the US, as shown by the defeat, later in the year, of many members of the US congress suspected of insufficient anti-Communist zeal.

The passions aroused by this drive against Communism spread very widely. Persons of liberal views, untainted by Communism, began to feel themselves affected by the political storm. Several universities demanded oaths of loyalty from their teaching staffs which some of these were not prepared to give. The issue of academic freedom became critical. A further spate of books and articles by ex-Communists and 'non-returning' refugees from the Soviet Union heightened this mood, and a holy war against Communism in the US, which felt it had most to lose by the advance of Communism, was plainly in process of beginning, and might well number among its victims many innocent liberals and unpolitical persons as well as Communist sympathisers.

This phenomenon also occurred, but on a far smaller scale, in Western Europe. The pursuit of security grew to be a major public concern and the discovery of hitherto undetected friends of the Soviet Union in positions of responsibility in various countries of Western Europe upset opinion in the US more than it did in those countries themselves. Thus the dismissal of the celebrated Communist physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie from his supervision of

French nuclear research shook, but did not cause an upheaval in, French public opinion. Repercussions of this campaign occurred in Australia and South Africa, in which bills to outlaw the Communist party were promulgated; South Africa pushed on with its policy of segregating its non-white natives in a world atmosphere less unfavourable to it than at the moment of liberal enthusiasm which followed the victory over fascism. In short, the question of one's attitude to the Soviet Union and Communism became the central social and personal issue of the time. The Soviet Union was ranged against the US, each ringed by its allies and dependencies, and the principal preoccupation of many Western Europeans was how to avoid being crushed in the collision of the great giants, against both of whom a rising resentment began to be felt. The kulturkampf between the two worlds had reached a stage which made other issues begin to seem irrelevant, and attempts at synthesis between the rival systems of ideas, of which there was a good deal of talk in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War, begin to seem futile.

This had several interesting and important consequences. In the countries which had been defeated by the Germans five years before, preoccupation with the danger of total destruction to some degree took precedence over older political beliefs and principles. Catholics and Communists were protected by their faith and guarded their sacred heritage; but the vast intermediate bloc of opinion, from unreflecting conservatives to left-wing non-Communist radicals, asked themselves not so much what it was they believed, what principles they were ready to defend, but the more pragmatic question – from which side the attack would come first and how it was to be averted. This practical problem of life and death, which the experiences of the very recent war of extinction had rendered particularly real, made the older theoretical issues, such as secularism versus clericalism, collectivism versus individualism, political versus economic action, and so on, seem somewhat academic and obsolete.

One of the alternatives to becoming obsessed with immediate perils was to concentrate one's attention upon remoter fields. The success of the existentialist philosophy in lands which had been ruled by fascists was certainly in part due to the fact that, by dealing in an impressively obscure metaphysical terminology, it

served as so often before to relieve, for example, many Germans of the painful need to contemplate their own past crimes and errors by sublimating the issue into a dark and lofty region where nothing was any longer sufficiently connected with daily life to stir remorse or indignation or human feeling applicable to the events of daily life. The French, with a philosophical and literary tradition less [xxv] capable of generating this kind of spiritual smokescreen, contrived to turn this mood into a literature which, in the works of M. Sartre, Mlle de Beauvoir, M. Camus and others, continued to create a very talented imaginative metaphysico-psychological fiction. thereby avoiding the sharp issues of the mounting crisis. This bifurcation – on the one hand the elimination of political philosophies and principles by an urgent preoccupation with the spectacle of approaching doom, accompanied by a search for the means to avoid it, and, on the other, elevation or immersion into a sphere above or below the terrors of daily life – did not develop in American, British or Scandinavian countries to a similar extent, perhaps because it was the result of harrowing moral experiences and a scepticism born of unbearable humiliation, to which these countries had not had to submit.

In England, and to a large extent in the Netherlands and Scandinavia also, public opinion became increasingly anxious about the approaching possibility of war between the giants; sections of opinion, both left- and right-wing, still nursed the hope of being able to remain neutral, albeit with diminishing confidence. The US – the symbol of an active attitude to the coming struggle for power – at times became almost as great an irritant to British Conservatives as to adherents of the Labour Party, which continued to be in power. The root of this attitude lay not merely in the natural resentments which painful stabilisation at a level of lesser influence and power must naturally induce among previously dominant nations and continents, but in the feeling, familiar enough to Americans (since it was an ingredient of American isolationism of both the right and the left in the two decades before Pearl Harbor), of wishing to be left to solve their own sufficiently acute social and economic problems without being drawn into a lethal war by powers too strong to resist, too hard to influence, and yet impossible to ignore or offend, inasmuch as one of them at any rate was the source of indispensable financial and economic aid.

And yet in spite of much angry criticism in the socialist and liberal press of Western Europe and the British dominions of what was considered heavy-handed or blundering American diplomacy in Europe, or ignorance and bigotry on the part of influential circles of American opinion, a clear majority of the groups and individuals which form Western European opinion felt the US to be their indispensable protector against the designs of the expansionist Soviet Union. The situation was, indeed, in some respects not unlike the state of US opinion in the late 1930s: the number of Americans who were in those days positively pro-Fascist was very small, although distrust and disapproval of Europe was very widespread; there was disdainful talk of 'rival imperialisms' from whose degrading struggle the new world should steer clear; but even then it was obvious that as against Hitler and Mussolini, US opinion was solidly on the side of the democracies. So now, Western European opinion, resentfully, distrustfully and uneasily, ranged itself on the side of Washington and against Moscow, although the pro-Moscow minorities were relatively larger, more indignant, although perhaps no more influential, and held their ground more steadily, than pro-Fascist groups in the US ten years before.

IV

Certainly the Communists did not increase in influence during the year: in England and northern Europe they remained negligible. The case of Britain was instructive. In the British general election, which returned the British Labour Party to precarious power with a minute majority of six, the Communist representation of two was wiped out altogether; and bitter though controversies over such measures as steel nationalisation and the tempo of rearmament at times became in the British Houses of Parliament, the attitude to the Soviet Union played relatively little part therein. On the major issues of foreign policy both the Conservative and the Labour Parties were in tacit agreement, and when events made the British government's rearmament plans seem ludicrously inadequate, the government no less than the opposition accepted this fact without a struggle, so that what in fact, in all but name, was a 'bipartisan' foreign and defence policy remained singularly undisturbed, despite the temptation which a tiny government majority would

have presented to a morally less responsible opposition at a less perilous moment.

In France and Italy, Communism and its sympathisers offered a far greater danger, yet even there the Communist Party made no headway. The somewhat right-wing cabinets in France of Bidault and Plevén (with a very short interlude under Henri Queuille), and the De Gasperi government in Italy, successfully stemmed the left-wing tide. The Stockholm Peace Petition had made some impression. The French CGT unions remained under Communist influence, and so did corresponding trade unions in Italy and Belgium, and these from time to time staged spectacular strikes; but the net result of this was not significant. Despite such traditionally demoralising factors as bitter disputes about wages and taxes, about electoral reform and Catholic schools, despite the attempts by Communists to start disorders by attacks on the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro*, and the campaign to build up the Communist leader Thorez into a national champion of patriotic democracy – a kind of Gambetta or Jaurès – and the fearless enemy of the cosmopolitan conspiracy of bankers and warmongers, French political life did not go through a major crisis. Some Polish Communists were expelled and relations with Poland and the Soviet Union deteriorated. There was a violent campaign against Jules Moch, who had been an exceptionally active minister of the interior and of defence, and was attacked from both right and left, being accused by the left of brutal oppression of political liberties, and by the right of opposing German rearmament, to the detriment of France and Western defence; but this assault, from which both Communists and Gaullists seemed to [xxvi] expect much, finally petered out. The constructive imagination of France manifested itself in the so-called Schuman Plan, largely inspired by Jean Monnet, for the integration of iron and steel production in Europe under a supernational authority. In the controversy with Britain that ensued, France appeared to be speaking for Europe more truly than any other great nation. But this was the official voice of France; there were no echoes of it in French art or literature, still absorbed, save for the Communists, with personal themes.

Even in Belgium, where a major succession crisis shook the country, stability was preserved. The very large and bitterly hostile minority opposed to King Leopold's return (which included left-

wing parties, liberals, trade unionists, and so on) nearly caused a civil war. Disturbances occurred; there were violent deaths; a Communist leader was assassinated. Finally a compromise was adopted by the acceptance of King Leopold's son Prince Baudouin as king. Thus even in Belgium Communism was in 1950 not a serious internal danger, and the same was true of most of the countries of Western Europe.

Yugoslavia under Tito continued as a heretical outpost against orthodox Communism, thereby incidentally providing an outlet for the loyalty of those left-wing intellectuals in Western Europe who most of all abhor capitalism and even the kind of socialism which compromises with it, and would like to come to terms with, but cannot quite bring themselves to swear absolute obedience to, the despotic demands of undiluted Soviet Communism. Spain and Portugal continued under their dictatorships; Greece, with the Communists crushed, consolidated its economic position; Switzerland continued to be solidly Conservative, while Germany and Austria remained battlegrounds between the ideologies modified by local religious and nationalistic traditions.

The US saw itself (as indeed it was) in the role of a financial patron and saviour, engaged in shoring up the rickety European structure against an otherwise unavoidable collapse, and showed some resentment against isolationist or 'neutralist' attitudes on the part of countries which only it had saved from being gobbled by the Soviet crocodile, and who now appeared to be venting their ill temper upon their largely disinterested rescuer. Consequently, there was much talk in the US of inability to help those who showed no desire to help themselves, and of a limit to the feasibility of defending those obstinately labouring under separatist delusions. Unless Europe gave some concrete sign of federating itself into a political and economic unit, capable at any rate of some degree of serious self-defence, its military future looked to US observers very gloomy; the various international organisations seemed disappointingly unable to create a single political and economic texture; and Britain, with its Scandinavian followers, looked like the ringleader in the prevention of a European union on US lines, because, so it was held, Britain was dominated by a selfish fear of losing its world position which depended on its extra-European connections.

On the other hand, it was allowed that Attlee's government, despite its minute majority, showed a remarkable capacity for survival; Parliament behaved with a commendable sense of responsibility; on major issues of foreign policy it seemed largely undivided, and the angry taunts occasioned by Sir Stafford Cripps's devaluation of the pound were silenced by the solid fruits of this audacious step. Sir Stafford Cripps retired, leaving Britain in a financial position stronger than that during the previous year. In the autumn the British government took the spectacular step of declaring itself no longer in need of Marshall aid, and yet this nation insisted on displaying an apparent lack of solidarity with its neighbours in Western Europe. It looked for all the world as if French and Italians, the Benelux countries and others were ready enough to form a union, but for sabotage by the British Labour government, which had shown itself no less isolationist and empire-minded than its Conservative predecessors. Winston Churchill lent his great authority to such a view and demanded a greater degree of European integration; spokesmen of the British government declared that the lowering of economic standards of living, with a sudden reversal of the British economy by 'integrating' it into the complementary continental economy, even to the limited extent proposed by the Schuman plan, with control no longer vested in democratically elected parliaments, could hardly strengthen Western Europe or the free world. Their opponents replied that this was mere defence of the obsolete, and now obstructive, concept of national sovereignty against wider forms of association, posing as a demand for democratic control.

The Middle Eastern countries, preoccupied with the internal social problems arising from the semi-feudal systems under which they live, filled with bitter hostility towards the new State of Israel, and nursing resentful memories of the defeat of their armies, and of lack of concrete sympathy from the Western allies, took up a stiffly neutral position vis-à-vis the East-West conflict, pronouncing themselves anti-Communist indeed, but in favour of a more cautious and independent policy of no alliances with the great powers, to avoid fresh disillusionments.

India and Pakistan, themselves in the grip of a ruinous conflict, with war between them narrowly averted and a fierce dispute about the territory of Kashmir, displayed an equal neutrality. Turkey proved the freedom of its institutions by the result of

elections in which Kemal Atatürk's successor had been defeated and was peacefully succeeded by the leader of the opposition; neither party concealed its fear of the Soviet Union, and both were unequivocally on the side of the West. Iran (Persia), which alone held the distinction of having successfully frustrated Soviet plans by purely diplomatic means, continued to tread a cautious and tortuous path. China, under a victorious Communist government, violently denounced American aid to the defeated nationalists now driven to the island of Formosa. The French were pursuing a none too successful war against the left-[xxvii]wing Vietnam party in Indochina, supported Emperor Bao Dai, and complained of insufficient help from the US in the campaign. The new Indonesian republic finally stabilised its relations with the Dutch on a solid basis and was granted admission to the ranks of the United Nations.

V

The assumption that all the new republics with seats in the assembly of the United Nations lived in the same century was not entirely justified: on 2 April the government of the Burmese republic, in the midst of a civil war against its Karen rebels, suddenly resigned; official astrologers were ceremoniously consulted, and, five minutes later, the government resumed its office. In Malaya left-wing terrorism continued, with Chinese Communist aid as in the case of Indochina. Thailand was nervous but relatively peaceful under its new king. In Korea the Soviet-supported government of the north and the US-supported government of the south glared at each other balefully across the artificial dividing line of the 38th parallel. This was the situation until June, when the North Korean government invaded South Korean territory, using the age-old formula that they had received intelligence that the South Koreans were on the point of launching a major attack upon them. On 26 June, the day after the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel – a term destined to become unforgettable by endless reiteration – President Truman, with the approval of the majority of the Security Council of the United Nations, offered air and naval aid to the attacked South Korean government, and a few days later, after the Security council had formally called upon all its members to aid it in repelling the aggressor, the US, Great Britain, the non-Asiatic British dominions

and other members of the United Nations sent reinforcements to support the South Koreans in their war.

VI

There is no need to trace here the vicissitudes of this war. After the initial reverses by the forces of the United Nations at the hands of the North Koreans, widely held to be armed and trained by the Soviet Union, the invaders were repelled and driven back by General MacArthur's forces (of which much the greater part was supplied by the US) after a successful landing in their rear; the United Nations forces drove across the 38th parallel and to certain points on the Manchurian border, where in November they unexpectedly met a large Chinese army which in its turn drove the United Nations forces across the peninsula, so that by the end of the year they were arrayed near the 38th parallel, awaiting further attack. This was the first serious armed conflict between a state supported by the Soviet Union and its satellites, and a State supported by other members of the United Nations. The possibility of world war seemed suddenly greatly increased, and under its shadow the lines were still more tightly drawn. Various agencies of the United Nations, while expressing their abhorrence of the act of aggression, unsuccessfully attempted to end immediate hostilities by an armistice or a ceasefire order.

For a period American opinion achieved greater unity than at any time since the end of the Second World War; for a time the violent personal attacks upon the State Department and US foreign policy ceased to occupy the forefront of attention. President Truman's bold act in sending military aid to Korea was acclaimed as truly representing the will of the American people. That curious combination of isolationism, acute right-wing nationalism and conservatism in domestic affairs, linked with the passionate emphasis on Far Eastern in preference to European involvement which had characterised the isolationist camp during the Second World War, for once seemed to melt, and its leaders to approach more closely the outlook of the internationalist leaders of the Democratic administration and the State Department. Even the preoccupation with the Communist Trojan horse took second place to the consciousness of international responsibility, of the US as the leader of the free nations against totalitarian aggression. But the mid-term elections proved that the activities of Senator

McCarthy and his allies had nevertheless borne fruit; a number of liberal senators and congressmen were defeated, 'rock-ribbed' Republicans were elected by increased majorities, the inquisitors of the State Department and the US administration generally were returned in great force, and although the revered figure of General Marshall soon entered the cabinet to replace the somewhat discredited Louis Johnson, violent onslaughts on policies common to him and Acheson continued unabated.

In Europe the Korean War produced at first admiring approval, on the part of the majority, of the US president's attempt to back words with deeds and demonstrate that the United Nations could defend its interests by force as well as argument. But after the initial North Korean advance continued, reaction set in. It took the form of protests against what was conceived as an unnecessary war, particularly when this was represented as being due to the intemperate policies of the great non-European powers, who neither understood nor cared for the survival of Western Europe and its values. Opinion presently crystallised round the views expressed by Churchill (whom no one could accuse of pro-Soviet tendencies or anti-American feeling or inclination to undue pessimism) when he told the House of Commons that the Asiatic war was a diversion from the main issue, which lay in Europe – a trap into which major Western powers must not allow themselves to be drawn. This seemed only too clearly to be also the opinion of the Labour cabinet, and Attlee's swift resolve to visit Washington, DC, acclaimed in France and elsewhere as a move likely to sober alleged American extremism, emphasised this as a general European attitude, which in its turn provoked American charges of European cowardice and ingratitude. Presently certain Asiatic powers together with Arab states, who looked upon themselves **[xxviii]** as a neutral third force in this conflict, offered their mediation. Their proposal was rejected by the Soviet bloc, to whom the whole situation may well have looked uncommonly like a repetition of Western intervention in Russia in 1918, with Chiang Kai-shek as a kind of Chinese Denikin or Kolchak, and the United Nations as an angry but in the end insufficiently resolute entente, bent on intervention against a nation in arms, but, as always, with inadequate forces.

In this dark atmosphere quarrels and recriminations between the Western Allies naturally grew in frequency and bitterness.

Britain maintained that, if its advice had initially been followed by the US and the Chinese Communist government recognised by the United Nations at the beginning of the year, Chinese intervention in Korea, and possibly even its invasion of Tibet (which astonished and dismayed the socialist Indian prime minister, Nehru), might not have occurred. American statesmen maintained that if they had earlier been allowed to rearm the Germans, there would now have been in Europe a far more solid obstacle to Russian aggression. The French declared that to allow the Germans a large army was the most fatal of all moves – the recreation of the Reichswehr with its sinister memories of the Rapallo agreement, followed by General Seeckt's secret and successful rearming of the Germans after 1918, and finally the Russo–German pact of 1939; it was surely better to let the Germans enter a European army as individuals rather than as units. The Western Germans, meanwhile, were divided into those who did not wish to bear the brunt of war again under any circumstances, and rejected rearmament as a prelude to being turned into cannon fodder for the Western powers, and those like Adenauer, the chancellor, who for reasons of national pride refused rearmament unless the establishment of some kind of independent German military establishment were authorised.

The year closed with only a very partial compromise upon these questions, with a wide divergency of views in America and Europe as to the need to fight a full-scale Asiatic war, and in the midst of military setbacks and a prospect of a dark future. Nevertheless, the basic alliance of the Western powers remained intact and the appointment of General Eisenhower as supreme commander of the forces of the Atlantic powers in Europe was, as was noted above, symbolic of a degree of unity scarcely imaginable a few years before.

VII

Meanwhile the life of the peoples under Soviet influence remained opaque to Western eyes. So far as one could tell, the Soviet Union itself was absorbed in the pursuit of its post-war plan to achieve greatly increased production, at the expense of progress in the arts of peace, of both guns and butter. To the accompaniment of the (by now normal) punishments for inefficiency and sabotage on the part of those engaged in production, great economic progress was

reported in the Soviet press. In the sphere of culture the acute chauvinism of the previous year was kept up, indeed intensified, and foreign influences still more rigidly excluded; apart from an exiguous but valuable stream of purely academic literary scholarship engaged in restoring the texts and publishing hitherto unknown fragments of the works of the authors admitted into the Soviet canon, nothing of general significance, or even notoriety, came from the Soviet Union in 1950, apart from a sudden and, as it seemed to the outside world, bizarre pronouncement by Stalin himself, in which he publicly condemned the views of academician Marr, hitherto a sacrosanct Soviet authority on linguistics, who had put forward views of increasing eccentricity until his death in 1934, which had made him and his followers the laughing stock of scholars in other countries. Stalin explained in a newspaper article that language did not necessarily alter as a direct function of the change in the class structure of society, but obeyed slower laws. This was the first pronouncement for many years on a theoretical topic by the high priest of Communist orthodoxy. As such it was not merely accepted with the routine universal adulation by all Communist scholars, but gave hope that the violent drive against artists and authors accused of insufficient Marxist orthodoxy might now be somewhat relaxed, at any rate in regions relatively free from politics – that, in fact, they might share in the blessings of the linguists so suddenly and gratifyingly freed from their heaviest theoretical fetters.

In the satellite countries the process of eliminating ‘fellow travellers’ and ‘soft’ Communists from key positions continued, and the primary duty of each country was rammed home to each and all of them. In Poland an obviously precarious and short-lived arrangement was arrived at with a certain representative of the Roman Church³ whereby Catholic worship was to be tolerated on terms duly denounced as not being acceptable to the Vatican. The violent abuse of, and threats against, Tito and his heretical regime continued unabated, but the major weapons in this war of words were naturally reserved for the US. The attack used in the course of propaganda to, and within, the Western countries was two-pronged; in each case it attributed to the US policies of which the Soviet Union was itself more frequently and plausibly accused. It

³ Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901–81), Primate of Poland.

stressed the desirability of peace, endangered solely by American imperialist greed, but also it appealed openly to the national traditions of each country, and to its longing to remain free and independent, and true to its own national traditions, as opposed to exploitation and destruction as so much raw material for the ruthless American war machine.

The English were duly reminded that they were the land of Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, and not the degenerate tools of the bankers of Wall Street. The French were invited to reflect on the past glories and the revolutionary tradition of the republic, and on the ancient friendship between France and Russia, and France's traditional hostility to England. [xxix] Herbert Hoover's call to his country to return to old-fashioned isolationism and to abandon the European continent to its own devices – if need be to perish as the victim of its own ridiculous ineptitude – was given an almost approving prominence in the Soviet press. Ever stricter Stalin worship was demanded from the satellite press and public. The last remaining non-political poets and artists in satellite countries had pressure put upon them to pay homage to Stalin as the champion of humanity and peace. The US was represented as the symbol at once of war and of a vulgar and materialistic cosmopolitanism seeking to destroy Europe, the cradle of civilisation, morally, intellectually and physically, an image made familiar originally by Nazi propaganda, and at various times applied by it both to the US and to the Soviet Union, and then in turn used to describe Germany itself by Soviet publicists in the period of friction before the Soviet–Nazi friendship pact of 1939.

VIII

So far as the arts and letters and thought are concerned, 1950 was a remarkably undistinguished year. If we compare 1950 with the corresponding year after the First World War, the contrast is even more depressing. In 1923 such writers as Joseph Conrad, George Moore, H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw were still full of creative power; D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Sinclair Lewis, André Gide, Arnold Bennett and W. B. Yeats were at the height of their powers. Aldous Huxley, Edith Sitwell, Jean Cocteau, François Mauriac, Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot and other exceptionally gifted writers were beginning to arouse attention. If it be said that men of genius and even of striking talent are seldom noticed by

their contemporaries and loom much larger in retrospect than at the time of their emergence, and that consequently many a genius may today be writing or painting or composing and not be visible as yet to the average critical eye, it may be answered that the attitude towards the arts had greatly changed in a quarter of a century.

In those far off days the unorthodox and unconventional was often sharply condemned by the average respected critic, and sharp controversies were common about figures whom their followers claimed as men of genius, while their opponents denounced them as charlatans or the false idols of ephemeral coteries. Since then, so poor does the world seem to have grown in literary and artistic giants that the critics, so far from disparaging the unfamiliar or the disconcerting, seemed only too much on the alert to catch the faintest symptom of anything remotely suggestive of truly original talent. The danger now is not that men of gifts may be ignored or unjustly treated, but that the commonplace or the counterfeit may be over-praised by those who, in their terror of missing a masterpiece for lack of sensibility or perception, see a swan in every goose. The public can no longer, at any rate in Europe, be shocked into protest; even the most philistine assume that genius may be concealed in the incomprehensible. The capacity for sharp reaction, whether favourable or hostile, has grown very weak; the atmosphere is becalmed; eyes and ears are acutely strained to catch the faintest glimpse, the faintest whisper, of something interesting or unusual, and yet there is little enough that the most generous and comprehensive fisher of talent can catch in his net.

Among English-speaking writers, Evelyn Waugh's fantasy about Saint Helena continued his unique but by now familiar strain. Henry Green, Joyce Cary, William Sansom, Jocelyn Brooke, Liam O'Flaherty, Angus Wilson and Rose Macaulay added to the literature of imagination, but did not extend its boundaries in any dimension. In France Pierre Klossowski, André Dhôtel and M. Perain⁴ were new authors who wrote novels of distinction, but scarcely made a literary summer; Jean Giono and Julien Green added small jewels to the crowns secure upon their heads; Arthur Waley added yet another to his series of exquisite translations from

⁴ Untraced.

Chinese; in Germany Hans Jahn wrote a work of fiction worthy of serious comment. Nor was the situation very different in the field of criticism. Lord Russell, G. M. Young, Aldous Huxley, Graham Hough, Edward Sackville-West, Martin Turnell, Sir Maurice Bowra, Julien Benda, Rex Warner and Herbert Read produced essays of genuine distinction, but no new reputations were created, no well-established reputations were strikingly enhanced, no unfamiliar territory was discovered. There was much solid historical research, both in England and in the US. Henry S. Commager and Allan Nevins produced valuable historical surveys, Professor Neale and Mr Rowse made original contributions to knowledge of the Elizabethan age. Professor Feiling wrote a distinguished *History of England*. Professor Braudel produced a remarkable work on French medieval history and the Mediterranean, Professor Altamira's classical history of Spain was translated, and Menéndez Pidal's masterpiece on Spanish aesthetics may also now be read in English; E. R. Curtius put a lifetime of scholarship and thought into his book on the Latin tradition in medieval European Literature. Magistral editions of Theocritus by A. S. Gow, and of the *Agamemnon* by E. Fraenkel, were contributed by the universities of Cambridge and Oxford to the great storehouse of English learning. Monsignor Knox wrote a notable study of *Enthusiasm* – the emotional and spiritual deviations from the centre on the part of religious figures and preachers. The splendid edition of Ben Jonson, edited now by Percy Simpson alone, drew nearer to its close. G. G. Coulton's monumental and authoritative treatise on medieval monasticism achieved its posthumous culmination. John Hersey celebrated the heroic resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto to its Nazi executioners in *The Wall*, a work of greater humanitarian and historical than literary merit. Professors Renier, Halecki and Niebuhr wrote thoughtful works on the nature of history and its practice. Charles Morazé pursued his bold and original reinterpretation of recent history in terms of demographical and economic categories. A noble monument by Father Dvornik on the making of central and eastern Europe made its unobtrusive appearance.

Several elegant biographies appeared of a now familiar type, of which the most informative was that of the Victorian worthy, Monckton Milnes, by James Pope Hennessy. This was followed by several studies of the eighteenth century with publication of

hitherto unfamiliar private papers of which the most sensational was the lately discovered London journal of James Boswell. The life of Florence Nightingale by Miss Woodham Smith captured the public imagination. Bernard Berenson summed up a lifetime of critical experience in *Aesthetics and History*. Sir Osbert Sitwell added a charming pendant to his autobiography. Freya Stark, Wyndham Lewis, Sir Arthur Keith, Geoffrey Grigson, Mrs Franklin Roosevelt and Benedetto Croce wrote their reminiscences. Richard Aldington wrote the life of D. H. Lawrence and Louis Fischer a ponderous work on Gandhi. But these looked back to an older world. The public was reminded of the great distance which the world has travelled by the deaths of such great pillars of a civilisation, now oddly remote, as Bernard Shaw, General Jan Christiaan Smuts, Léon Blum, Henry Stimson, the composer Richard Strauss, the dancer Nijinsky and the actor Emil Jannings. Even the world of those who died at an age less ripe – the gifted, gay and versatile dilettante Lord Berners, the notable socialist Professor Harold Laski, Sinclair Lewis, who invented a famous literary genre – seemed cut off from contemporary life, and to belong to an almost golden age of audacious new directions which turned out to lead to reputable but hardly startling goals. Only George Orwell, the most incorruptible of all modern writers, who died in the beginning of the year, was thoroughly contemporary in the feeling and content of his remarkable satires and essays. His writings have made a genuinely deep impression on the younger British and American intellectuals, and his influence, both literary and political, in large part, perhaps, because of the moral severity and rigid integrity of his personal life, seems likely to have a lasting effect.

Meanwhile Agar, J. F. Dulles and Stringfellow Barr brought the lessons of history to bear upon the issues of our day in a large style, and based on presuppositions, which in Western Europe seemed no longer to be accepted.

IX

The poetry written during the year was neither better nor worse than that of other years, but on the whole less memorable; among the old masters, Walter de la Mare, Ezra Pound and M. Supervielle published volumes of verse. Among the newer poets, Barker, Gascoigne, Montale and Ungaretti made some mark. But the most

acclaimed works of this period were both works of poetic drama: T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* and Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning*. The first achieved great popular success on both sides of the ocean. It offered little new light upon Eliot's outlook but it was widely recognised as an ingenious and impressive translation of his social and religious principles into the medium of drama. As for Fry, his verbal felicity was conceded by the sternest critics to be of an uncommon order but he opened no new window, created no arresting new genre; nevertheless upon so flat and unimpressive a scene it was a performance of scintillating virtuosity, and sprang from a thin but genuine vein of talent.

X

In the world of music much was written that was both agreeable and competent; apart from the performance of the posthumous works of Bartok, and the latest works of such established masters as Hindemith and Vaughan Williams, nothing appeared to mark the year; Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Poulenc, even Benjamin Britten remained relatively silent. In place of creative music there was a notable rise in the standards of performance and of critical interest. the growth of love for serious music among sections of society hitherto contented with musical banalities, or jazz, or nothing at all, was truly arresting. The exceptional number of musical festivals in Europe alone testified to the fact that a more widespread interest in music was probably taken at this moment than at any previous period in history. The festivals of Salzburg, Lucerne, Aix-en-Provence, Siena, Perugia, Venice, Besançon, Edinburgh, Glyndebourne (and, in the US, of Tanglewood, Mass.), and above all the Prades festival, organised round the violoncellist Pablo Casals, by far the greatest instrumental player of his age, and dedicated to the memory of J. S. Bach, who died two hundred years ago – as well as many less known, but no less devoted, musical celebrations – provided a great enrichment to the world of pure art. The year was marred by the death of the Romanian pianist Dinu Lipatti who, still in his twenties, was a lyrical genius of the first order.

The great creative impetus which produced the remarkable Italian films of previous years seemed to be, not indeed exhausted, but running at a lower ebb. The best films, and none of these were of lasting value, were made, as so often, in France. The first classical culture of that country proved still the most solid framework for the arts. In literature, music and painting, if it produced nothing notable, it did not lower standards. Picasso alone, in his new light-hearted genial mood, produced work of wonderful gaiety and imagination. He painted ceramics, he published lithographs of satyrs and nymphs on sunlit rocks in Provence, he quarrelled with England for failing to admit his Communist friends to its shores, and paid England back by refusing to allow his work to be exhibited in London, and by designing the 'dove of peace', which became the emblem of pro-Soviet feeling on the eastern side of the 'iron curtain'.

Politics played a greater part in art than ever before. [xxxix] Creative artists of all kinds were deeply committed to both sides of the great East–West controversy; they took part in the congress dedicated to the freedom of culture held in Berlin and critical of Soviet methods, and they were involved in the counterstroke in the form of the 'peace' congress summoned originally to meet in Sheffield but finally shifted to Warsaw owing to the inability of many delegates to satisfy the British immigration authorities of their peaceful intentions. In general, metaphysical and moral considerations dominated in the world of art and letters at the expense of aesthetic and 'formal' or frankly hedonistic tendencies. The mood was of the kind that Tolstoy would have approved: preoccupied with tormenting doubts about the ends of life, which entered into considerations of every issue – whether centenary reappraisals of Wordsworth or R. L. Stevenson in England, or the historical studies in Germany (where only the very old and very grand – Alfred Weber and Friedrich Meinecke – were not engaged on apologies of German nationalism), or the metaphysical writings of French and German philosophers.

In philosophy, indeed, the great chasm between, on the one hand, the clear, dry world of Anglo-American (and to some extent Scandinavian) empiricism, with its preoccupation with the importance of different uses of language in life and in the sciences, and, on the other, the darker and more personally anguished world of French and German religious or aesthetic or political metaphysics, was never deeper or more unbridgeable. Neither side recognised merit in the other, and no interpreters appeared to explain these apparently disparate activities to the other camp. To the lucid prose-writers of the English-speaking world, the 'logic' of, for example, Karl Jaspers appeared at best as a deep, impenetrably dark, romantic meditation whose claim to be a treatise on logic bore no relation to anything which they might understand by this term. Nor did they with any greater degree of success grasp the import of the Gifford lectures of the French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel, or the agonised *pensées* and fragments of Simone Weil. Doubtless to thinkers of this kind, struggling like so many Laocoons with cosmic issues on which they most suppose salvation in some sense to depend, the logical writings of such positivists as Professor Ryle of Oxford, or such logicians as Professor Quine of Harvard, must, in their turn, have appeared thin, arid and almost wholly pointless. As for that quasi-philosophical world in which literature has a common frontier with abstract thought – that unclassifiable no-man's-land between the two, whose condition serves often as the truest index of the vagaries of the zeitgeist – in that world formalism and positivism seemed to be yielding ground to a kind of neo-Romantic revival, in which criticism both of the arts and of life drew its inspiration from Dostoevsky, Kafka, Kierkegaard and the German Romantics, rather than the tradition of European enlightenment, with its emphasis on clarity, its reliance on accessible evidence, rational argument and secular values.

In the meantime the Communist writers on either side of the 'iron curtain' pursued their undeviatingly narrow path, heedless of all but the dogma to which they seemed attached with an ever growing intensity. The most gifted among them, the Hungarian Marxist George Lukács, made some impression when his literary studies appeared in the course of the year in an English translation.

The world of art and of ideas seemed to be in a state of détente, possibly a trough before a splendid crest, but indubitably a trough. It was scarcely made more attractive by the sudden widespread popularity of television as a new method of mass communication; in due course T. S. Eliot gravely warned his English compatriots against this fatal American innovation as likely to destroy the last vestige of fastidious taste. Yet no fewer than 100,000 copies each of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were purchased in the US in the course of this same year. Matthew Arnold would certainly have abhorred the use, if not the notion, of television; but at the same time he believed passionately in the educational value of the great classics. It is difficult to measure the progress and regression of civilisations: the facts must be left to speak for themselves.

XIII

The principal trends of the moment accurately reflected the social and political state of the world. There was too much uncertainty, too much fear and tension for either of two possibilities to be realised: either of a lyrical and imaginative escape from the repellent realities, as had happened during other periods of darkening skies; or, on the other hand, of a serious effort towards some realistic technique capable of restating the central problems (even if not their solutions) in a manner adequate to the new kinds of human experience. The works most characteristic of the year 1950, whether they were inspired by Communist or capitalist ideals, whether they were objective and positivist or personal and romantic, took forms which no longer fitted their relatively new content, and therefore made the result seem either lifeless or curiously ill-compounded – in the latter case an urgent, earnest but unsuccessful effort to speak in a medium which had conspicuously outlived its usefulness to an audience all too anxious to be told whatever there was to say by anyone who had something genuinely novel to express and had discovered, what was still missing, some method of effective communication. Never was the world more patently prepared for a new turn in the development of art and, indeed, other forms of thought and imagination, and never did the emergence of new forms created by, or at least appropriate to, the crucial moment seem so obstinately delayed everywhere – no less in Marxist than in non-Marxist and anti-Marxist societies.

NINETEEN FIFTY

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