

this year our two countries will celebrate the centennial of the Statue of Liberty.

Our task today is to strike a balance in our exchanges. That is our purpose in setting up a French book center in New York City, for example. It is clear that in the cultural field, the United States exports more than it imports. Such power can harm not only those countries that are subjected to it but also those countries that exercise it. If all countries had the same cultural standards and reference points, no influence or exchange of ideas would be possible. The United States should not want the whole world to reflect its image. America was made from many cultures, and it is in its interest to be surrounded by strong nations able to preserve their own integrity. The United States can know its grandeur only by knowing that of other nations. □

■ WEST GERMANY

A Revolutionary Republic

Willy Brandt, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974, is chair of the Social Democratic Party. His contribution to this issue arose out of conversations with editorial board member Norman Birnbaum. It was translated by Gerhard Thiebach.

WILLY BRANDT

Because *The Nation* was founded in 1865, I will begin with an excerpt from a letter sent in January of that year to Abraham Lincoln by one of my eminent predecessors in the European and German social democratic movements:

We congratulate the American people on your re-election by a large majority.

If resistance to the Slave Power was the reserved watchword of your first election, the triumphant wacry of your re-election is, Death to Slavery!

From the commencement of the titanic American strife the workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class. The contest for the territories which opened the dire epopee, was it not to decide whether the immense tracts of virgin soil should be wedded to the labor of the emigrant or prostituted by the tramp of the slave driver?

When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the annals of the world, "slavery" on the banner of armed revolt; when on the very spots where hardly a century ago, the idea of one great democratic republic had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century; when on those very spots counterrevolution, with systematic thoroughness, gloried in rescinding "the ideas entertained at the time of the formation of the old Constitution," and main-

tained "slavery to be a beneficent institution, indeed the only solution to the great problem of the relation of labor to capital," and cynically proclaimed property in man "the cornerstone of the new edifice"; then the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. Everywhere they bore therefore patiently the hardships imposed upon them by the cotton crisis, opposed enthusiastically the pro-slavery intervention, importunities of their "betters," and from most parts of Europe contributed their quota of blood to the good cause.

They consider it an earnest of the epoch to come, that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.

The letter was signed by the members of the Central Council of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) and drafted by Karl Marx. My American friends inform me that it has not been read aloud at the Republican Party's National Conventions. That is a pity; Americans would do well to remind themselves that for much of its history their nation was a bearer of hope for the economically and socially exploited, a revolutionary republic whose very existence disturbed the crowned heads and propertied classes of the Old World.

My first awareness of the United States came during the early struggle against Nazism in my country. When the black night descended on Germany, we found consolation in the United States. We saw Franklin Roosevelt's broad program of social reforms, backed by a newly resurgent union movement and many other populist groups, as the promise of democracy. The United States gave refuge to many of our comrades in the anti-Nazi movement. Some of them returned to work with me in the Social Democratic Party after the war ended. In the immediate postwar years their direct experience of the vitality of a working democracy, a democracy that strove for social equality and observed parliamentary forms, enriched our efforts to develop a political ethic in West Germany.

As Mayor of West Berlin I had unflagging support from official and unofficial Americans and American groups (particularly the unions) in the difficult task of defending democratic values in our city by democratic means. Undoubtedly the Marshall Plan, which provided a stimulus for American industry, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization served American interests. But the United States acted with an awareness that its interests were served by respecting the independence of our nation. As a Social Democrat I was close to the New Deal wing of the Democratic Party, and later to John Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey. But I also had many useful talks with more conservative American officials and politicians.

In the turbulent 1960s Europeans witnessed America's great progress in reducing economic and social inequality through the Great Society programs. In retrospect we can say that the conflicts of that decade proved to us the vitality of American democracy. The outlawing of racial segregation, the election of black mayors in many of your great cities, is evidence for us that however much remains to be done, democracy is capable of regeneration. The debate that raged over the Vietnam War serves as a warning to political leaders in the Western alliance that they cannot invoke the "national interest" or the "battle against communism" to evade the painful process of building a domestic consensus for policies that demand sacrifices from their people. And those Americans who criticize the West German peace movement ought instead to be proud that it was the example of American democracy that inspired our young people. Incidentally, I find it a sad commentary that low-level German magistrates send protesters to jail or make them pay large fines for having demonstrated outside NATO missile bases, while Americans celebrate a national holiday in honor of that great practitioner of civil disobedience, Martin Luther King Jr.

When I was Chancellor, I had to deal with Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who were very different from my friends among the Democrats. Today, when many American officials demand a holy crusade against communism (except in China), and against anyone and everything they dislike outside the fifty states, it is refreshing to recall the realism of Nixon and Kissinger. When West Germany sought to contribute to international peace and stability by regularizing its relations with the other Germany, the Eastern European states (particularly Poland) and the Soviet Union, the two men did not oppose our *Ostpolitik*. Of course, at that time the United States itself pursued a policy of *détente* and arms control.

Those in the United States who then organized the campaign against ratification of the Salt II treaty (and for that matter against *détente*) did their country a great disservice. To seek superiority in the nuclear age is to pursue an illusion. We are condemned to coexistence or to mutual suicide. Public opinion polls have shown time and again that a majority of Americans agree with that proposition, and that they also oppose military intervention in Central America, especially if U.S. troops must be sent to accomplish what the *contras* cannot. I have always believed that the common sense of the majority will ultimately triumph over the ideological and political extremists who criticize rational arrangements for international stability as hopeless utopianism or moral cowardice. (We in Europe have noticed that many of your rhetorical heroes are at pains to leave the fighting to others.)

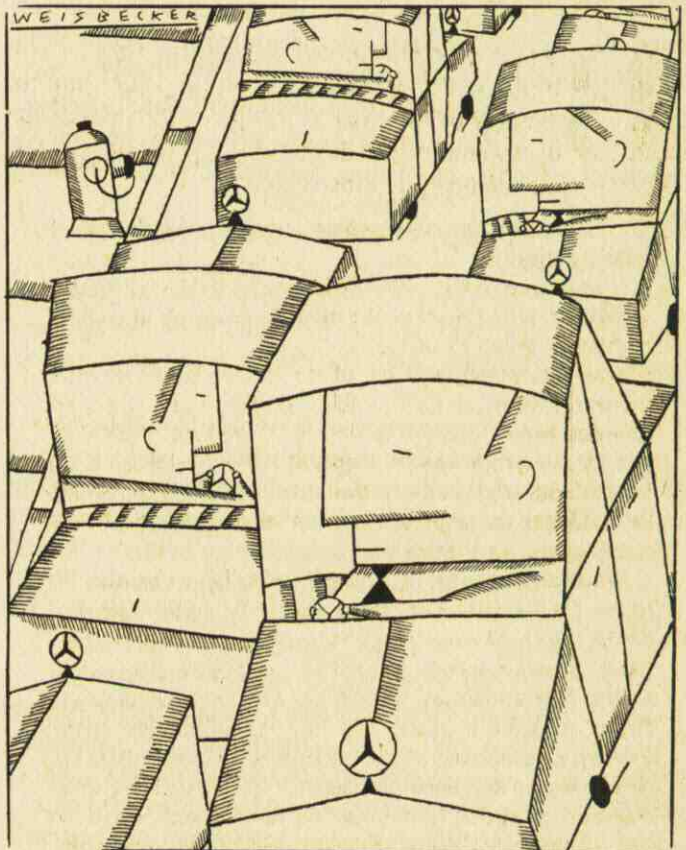
It is no secret that a significant segment of the European population disagrees strongly with U.S. policy on some major issues. We think the future of the world economy and the stability of our own societies cannot be left to the blind workings of the market so long as competition is among participants with unequal power. We regard the welfare state (introduced in America by Roosevelt as we were

struggling with fascism) as a victory of common civic purpose. We believe that the wealthy nations have a moral duty, which is in their own long-term interests, to aid the poor people of the world. And we consider no task more urgent and more noble than the construction of a framework of common security. Again, we note from public opinion polls and from debates in the U.S. Congress that many Americans agree with us. We also note that at Geneva, President Reagan (who has also wisely decided to continue to observe the provisions of SALT II) has taken steps toward bridging the gap between his Administration and much of Europe.

The world faces serious problems. Apart from the threat of nuclear extinction, we have to deal with global poverty and the destruction of the environment. In the democratic societies, technological unemployment and continuing scarcities of public, cultural and material goods make the realization of our ideals of democratic citizenship difficult. Nothing less than a global New Deal is needed. I do not use that term unadvisedly. The United States is the country of great social movements, from abolitionism to populism, from the beginnings of the American labor movement to the industrial unionism of the 1930s. It is also a country whose scholars and writers have never hesitated to criticize its institutions—not because they thought so little of America but because they had such high standards for it. It is also a society in which religious groups have frequently spoken with prophetic voices. I have no doubt that in the decade to

France

PHILIPPE WEISBECKER



come, Americans will renew their traditions of social innovation and reform. The revolutionary republic may be somnolent, but your friends do not believe that it is dead. □

UNITED STATES

The Empire Lovers Strike Back

Gore Vidal lives in Los Angeles and Rome. His coruscating essays on the U.S. global role always inflame as well as enlighten. Vidal has taken this occasion to respond to two of his critics, but he uses the sparks of this clash to illuminate his larger preoccupation: the changing image and reality of the American Empire.

Gore VIDAL

Recently, Norman Mailer and I chatted together at the Royale Theatre in New York, under the auspices of PEN American Center. Part of what I said was reprinted in these pages on January 11, under the title, not mine, "Requiem for the American Empire." I gave a bit of a history lesson about our empire's genesis, and I brooded on its terminus last fall, when Tokyo took over from New York as the world's economic center.

My conclusion: for America to survive economically in the coming Sino-Japanese world, an alliance with the Soviet Union is a necessity. After all, the white race is a minority race with many well-deserved enemies, and if the two great powers of the Northern Hemisphere don't band together, we are going to end up as farmers—or, worse, mere entertainment—for the more than one billion grimly efficient Asiatics. In principle, Mailer agreed.

As expected, that wonderful, wacky couple, Norman (Poddy) Podhoretz and his wife, Midge Decter, checked in. The Lunts of the right wing (Israeli Fifth Column Division), they are now, in their old age, more and more like refugees from a Woody Allen film: *The Purple Prose of West End Avenue*.

Poddy was the first to respond. He is the editor of *Commentary* (circulation 55,000, and allegedly falling; paid for by the American Jewish Committee). He is best known—and by me loved—for his autobiographical "novel," *Making It*, in which he tells us that he has made it because he has become editor of *Commentary* and might one day be a guest at the White House, as he has already been a guest of Huntington Hartford in Nassau. Over the years, Poddy has, like his employers, the A.J.C., moved from those liberal positions traditionally occupied by American Jews (and me) to the far right of American politics. The reason for that is simple. In order to get Treasury money for Israel (last year \$3 billion), pro-Israel lobbyists must see to it that America's "the Russians are coming" squads are in place so that they can con-

tinue to frighten the American people into spending enormous sums for "defense," which also means the support of Israel in its never-ending wars against just about everyone. To make sure that nearly a third of the Federal budget goes to the Pentagon and Israel, it is necessary for the pro-Israel lobbyists to make common cause with our lunatic right. Hence, the virulent propaganda.

Poddy denounced Mailer and me in the pages of the *New York Post*. According to him, we belong to that mindless majority of pinko intellectuals who actually think that the nation spends too much on the Pentagon and not enough on, say, education. Since sustained argument is not really his bag, he must fall back on the ad hominem attack, a right-wing specialty—and, of course, on our flag, which he wears like a designer kaftan because "the blessings of freedom and prosperity are greater and more widely shared [here] than in any country known to human history." Poddy should visit those Western European countries whose per capita income is higher than ours. All in all, Poddy is a silly billy.

Significantly, the one yiddish word that has gained universal acceptance in this country is *chutzpah*. Example: In 1960, Mr. and Mrs. Podhoretz were in upstate New York where I used to live. I was trying out a play at the Hyde Park Playhouse; the play was set during the Civil War. "Why," asked Poddy, "are you writing a play about, of all things, the Civil War?" I explained to him that my mother's family had fought for the Confederacy and my father's for the Union, and that the Civil War was—and is—to the United States what the Trojan War was to the Greeks, the great single tragic event that continues to give resonance to our Republic.

"Well, to me," said Poddy, "the Civil War is as remote and as irrelevant as the War of the Roses." I realized then that he was not planning to become an "assimilated American," to use the old-fashioned terminology; but, rather, his first loyalty would always be to Israel. Yet he and Midge stay on among us, in order to make propaganda and raise money for Israel—a country they don't seem eager to live in. Jewish joke, circa 1900: A Zionist is someone who wants to ship other people off to Palestine.

Midge was next to strike. But before she launched her attack, in something called *Contentions*, she put on her thinking cap and actually read what I wrote. I give her high marks for that. Unfortunately, she found my history lesson hard going. But then, like most of our Israeli fifth columnists, Midge isn't much interested in what the *goyim* were up to before Ellis Island. She also likes the ad hominem attack. When I noted that our writers seldom speak out on matters of war and peace because so many of them are paid for by universities that receive money from the garrison state, Midge tartly retorted, "He, after all, is not paid by a university but by those great centers of independence, the film companies." Since my last Hollywood film, *The Best Man*, was made in 1964, I have been "paid" by that American public that buys my books about the American past, a subject of no demonstrable interest to Midge and Poddy and their friends.

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