Mind over Matter

By EUGENE LYONS

While living in the Soviet Union and ever thereafter in the light of that experience, I have had almost daily occasion to marvel at the easy triumph of mind over matter. I have observed, that is to say, the great dexterity of the human brain in explaining away inconvenient facts and erasing reality.

I am not referring to the honest fraud practiced by partisans of the Moscow dictatorship. In juggling facts to save face for the Kremlin they make a knowing sacrifice of veracity on the altar of politics. Theirs is a strategy of disinformation to confuse "the enemy," on the ancient principle that all is fair in war and hate. No, I refer to the men and women who fool not others (except incidentally) but themselves; who in their fierce hunger for a dream manage to digest the most bitter and unpalatable realities. Their performance often seems comic to onlookers, but to those who have had their own time of anguished rationalization it seems closer to tragedy.

A particularly apt example is at hand in an article in the London *New Statesman and Nation* of December 26, by one John Berger. Mr. Berger got back from a recent pilgrimage to the Red Mecca, it is clear, wounded in spirit, his beliefs and hopes badly lacerated. In the article we watch his agile brain spread intellectual unguents on the raw wounds. Though I know nothing about Mr. Berger beyond the evidence of this essay, I would guess that he is without guile. Had it been his purpose deliberately to mislead readers, his trickery assuredly would have been less transparent.

Mr. Berger describes himself as an "English liberal or Left intellectual," and concedes at the outset that for this breed it is, alas, "a disturbing experience to go to Moscow." The rest of the article is given over to proving as best he can that the fault is not in Moscow but in himself. Unfortunately, as a Western "progressive" he had not been properly conditioned for the impact of what awaited him. Through no sin of his own he came to the Soviet capital mentally and psychologically handicapped by such nineteenth-century impedimenta as "an acute sense of morality," an "individual conscience," an endemic suspicion of "conformity" even when it is "Left" conformity. Small wonder, therefore, that he was confused and hurt—"disturbed" is his cover word for all his painful emotions.

Because he considers bourgeois morality "hypocritical," Mr. Berger explains to himself aloud, the Western liberal tends "to resent *any* generally accepted, official sense of morality." Having leaned all his life on individual conscience, he tends "to suspect that *any* limiting of complete freedom, *any* narrowing down of the paramount necessity of individual conscience, must be a deception." Because a critical attitude toward the *status quo* is in his blood, the poor "progressive" finds himself faced "with what seems a suspicious sense of conformity"; he "finds it hard to accept that the heretic is not always the same thing as the hero" and that where yesterday's heresy has become today's conformity, "his duty might be to expose heresy, *not* to profess or encourage it."

In short, Mr. Berger, prototype of the English Left intellectual, finds himself in a hell of a fix in the land where "the Left. . . has been solidly in power—never in Opposition—for thirty-six years." He cannot too easily adjust himself to the Soviet "reverence for the future" which presumably justifies all deprivations, oppressions, and horrors in the present. He must do some fancy logical acrobatics before he grasps that "in the resulting atmosphere of hopeful confidence, people put up with certain hard conditions fairly easily because they accept them as temporary"— only, that is to say, for a few more generations. Furthermore, "unused" to "a one-party, one-class system. . . the Western progressive may tend to feel that fundamental principles have been forgotten simply because they are not disputed, or that the apparent unity about them is not genuine simply because, for him, unity has come to mean unity in the face of opposition." The "idolatry" lavished on Stalin or some Stakhanovite "may well strike a Western rationalist as odd"—yes, his word is "odd."

There is more of this extraordinary stuff, but the sampling should convey the flavor. To Mr. Berger's credit, I would underline that for all his pathetic rationalizing he is honest enough to own up to his acute discomfiture. The Left liberal visitor in Moscow—he writes of himself in the third person to ease the pain—"will still remain puzzled by the general unity of opinion" he finds there. "Under any circumstances," he concludes in a final spasm, "it is a disturbing experience to go to Moscow; disturbing, above all, because in Moscow one is partly in the nineteenth century, partly in the twenty-first. From both angles one sees one's own society, one's own culture, one's own personality in a new historical perspective."

Unless Mr. Berger is far different from the average liberal, English included, this triumph of mind over matter will prove temporary. The doubts raised by his unhappy journey to Utopia will not down. That pesky individual conscience, that discomfort about unanimity of opinion, that sneaking sympathy for the heretic in the torture chambers—the heritage which in Moscow left him so brutally exposed and vulnerable—cannot, in the final analysis, be demolished by an act of will. Having been "disproportionately shocked by the wooden Moscow slums or the Lysenko controversy," he may well be on the highroad to heresy and emancipation.

Guilt by Association

By MURRAY T. QUIGG

Defending this concept, a lawyer points out the extent of an individual's responsibility for the acts of an organization of which he is a member.

"Guilt by association" is perhaps a new cliché. Lately the phrase has been coined or revived by those who decry the current exploration of congressional committees into the Communist apparatus and its methods. But if "guilt by association" means that a man may be put to some penalty because, consciously or unconsciously, by association with evil-doers he gives aid to them, it is as old as evil-doers and fools. From time inmemorial the innocent who have allowed themselves to be the dupes and tools of evil-doers have had to pay a penalty of some sort for their association, whether direct or indirect.

Dr. Henry Steele Commager, professor of history at Columbia University, presented himself in the *New York Times Magazine* of November 8, 1953, as a champion of the opposition to guilt by association. He calls it a doctrine. It is hardly that without some clear definition, but for brevity let us use his term.

For his first point, Dr. Commager says that the doctrine is unsound in logic "because it assumes that a good cause becomes bad if supported by bad men." On the contrary, it does not assume that men contaminate causes, but that causes contaminate men. So if the true cause of an organization is evil, though it hides under the cloak of virtue, those who knowingly or unknowingly supply that cloak are contaminated by the evil cause they help to hide—exactly as a criminal contaminates the man who, however upright otherwise, conceals the criminal from justice.

Dr. Commager's second declaration is that guilt by association is wrong legally. He says: "In Anglo-American law guilt is personal, not collective." Yet two sentences below he corrects himself and says: "There is, of course, such a thing as collective guilt in a conspiracy, but the laws dealing with conspiracy are ample to take care of this." The fact is that Anglo-American law has meted out punishment of one sort or another, criminal or civil, to those who by association with an evil-doer have assisted him or given him the opportunity for his wrongdoing, or subsequently endeavored to protect him from the consequences of his deed, even though they did not in any sense approve of it. Dr. Commager has but to acquaint himself with the law of partnership and the responsibility of each partner for the consequences of the acts of any partner, and to acquaint himself with the common law and statutes dealing with the accessories to a crime, as well as the laws of conspiracy, to inform himself that by association guilt may be collective and not merely personal.

He says that "To punish, either by law or by destruction of character or by forfeiture of job, the joining of an organization in 1937 or 1945 which was not held to be subversive or even suspect until 1950 is a violation of the spirit, if not of the letter of the Constitution. . ." It is, in fact, neither a violation of law nor the spirit of the Constitution that when a conspiracy is discovered those who allowed themselves to be used to conceal it, and to give to evil the appearance of good, should be condemned, even though the conspiracy flourished for a number of years before it was uncovered.

A Question of Practicality

For his third point, Dr. Commager calls the doctrine impractical in that it is neither possible nor desirable to engage in a check of the membership, past as well as present, of all organizations one is asked to join. Why should it not be practical before joining any organization to inquire into the character and background of the persons who are running it, and thereafter to give some attention to what they are doing? The more important a man supposes himself to be, the greater the moral obligation he has to look into what he is doing when he joins any association. For when men of high reputation allow their names to be used as supporters of organizations, it is assumed by others that they know what the association is about and are in control of its actual operation, when, as a matter of fact, they are not so at all.

It may be an unhappy commentary on our civilization that men of good will cannot safely give their approval and moral support to every sweet idea that is offered to them without finding later that they have led other men astray. Regrettable as that state of society may be, it cannot excuse them for their errors. On the contrary, it admonishes them that they must not do what they cannot take the time to understand.

Dr. Commager, after declaring that it is impractical to inquire into all organizations which solicit one's interest, is obliged to admit that "no one should give his name to an organization