WITCH-HUNTING, OLD AND NEW

In mediaeval times witch catching was a respectable and profitable calling. Professional witch hunters made a vocation of discovering night-riders of broomsticks and bringing them to justice and oblivion through purification by fire. Often the witch hunters were sincere, educated, and pious men dedicated to the fair practice of their profession. They tried not to err by condemning other than genuine witches. Their sole concern was in ridding society of evil persons. Unfortunately, they did not dream that their society produced witches —just as it produced castles, cathedrals, thumb screws, saints, and miracles — and produced these evil creatures on a steadily increasing basis.

MODERN WITCHES

Things are different today, of course, and hardly anyone believes that evil can be attributed to witches. The evildoers of these times do not ride broomsticks but mount soapboxes — the soapboxes of "extremist" rightist and leftist political and social organizations. And so, different as things may be, there are still to be found dedicated people who make a profession out of exposing and condemning these evildoers, these peddlers of un-American opinions that exist outside the manipulated consensus of mainstream thought. It seems unquestioned that this consensus is the prevailing "wisdom" between opposing follies.

Of course, in all fairness, many of today's "extremists" are truly obnoxious persons with obnoxious views. The American Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan are rightly regarded with loathing. Well - intentioned moderates of all political persuasions are rightly upset by the upsurge of blind hatred based upon irrational myths and upon paranoid suspicions of seemingly omnipresent plots. The Communist Party hounded, persecuted and riddled with F. B. I. agents — itself was guilty of defending the brutal crimes of Stalinist Russia. Considering the relative small number of these people, however, and considering the number of other larger problems of our times, one would think that moderates might find something more important to worry over.

Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency on the part of at least some individuals from the so-called mainstream of political thought to lump together *all* critics of the social order. Socialists, for example, even reformers of the social democratic variety, and generally mild-mannered libertarians are sometimes presented as part of the same category, "extremists" who will bear watching. Interestingly enough, the Communist parties indulged in this tactic during the Thirties, branding Social-Democrats generally, as "Social Fascists" while liberals shuddered.

GORDON HALL

The Boston area was noted for its witch-hunting in the 17th century. Guided tours of Salem, Massachusetts today are careful not to omit such attractions as Witch House and Gallows Hill. But modern Boston also has its witch-hunters, the best known being a gentleman of the name Gordon Hall. Gordon Hall is a modern day Cotton Mather, aglow with the enthusiasm needed to exorcise extremists. Not that Mr. Hall should be confused with the old style McCarthyist. No, he is a staunch advocate of what is widely known as democracy and he concentrates as much time and effort on right-wing extremists as on left wing. In other words, Gordon has made a business out of his efforts for American "democracy" and even if he may never get rich he is, nevertheless, able to work at something he likes, travel extensively, and net better than the average working-class upholder of Americanism — by a good deal.*

* See: Battler Against Bigotry" by Roul Tunley, Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 8, 1962.

Yes, his work may be classed as dangerous in that he risks life and limb from extremists but this is true of many other fighters for principles — on a strictly gratis basis — as for example, revolutionary socialists.

Mr. Hall is an interesting case of the frustration of today's moderates. He felt the call to his vocation when, upon returning to the United States at the end of his World War II service in the Aleutian Islands, he was shocked to find here the same type of mentality which fathered the very movements that the war was supposed to have been fought to destroy. Imagine the irony! Hall, like other naive innocents, spent years in uniform risking his neck to help destroy a foreign "enemy" in the impression that he was undertaking an unpleasant but necessary task that would abolish alien hate-mongering and save the world for the "American Way of Life." Then he returns home and takes a closer look at this revered "Way of Life" and finds — horror of horrors! that it too contains the same poisoned seeds.

Unfortunately, years of effort by well-meaning people like Hall were unable to prevent the spread of hate politics in this evermore-educated and evermore-prosperous land. Why? This is the question that must gnaw at the foundations of a particularly smug assumption of liberals — an assumption that capitalism, despite its frustrations and its frequent call to arms, can function without "hate" politics.

CAPITALISM, THE CULPRIT

Socialists know that this assumption is mistaken. It is American society that is the real culprit and not a handful of emotionally disturbed hoodlums. Social movements of the hate type grow in certain social conditions so it is useless to try to avoid the symptoms while retaining the social breeding ground.

The real tragedy of the "democracy" crusaders is that they try to fight the politics of hate and racism but are blind to the real cause ot the evil they oppose. They do not understand the fact that their best efforts are doomed to failure because of this blindness. They either do not understand or do not dare to seek the social causes of the groups they oppose in the workings of the social system they defend so they must — like Sisyphus — continually roll the stone of brotherhood uphill where capitalist convulsions send it rolling down again.

The continuing convulsions of the capitalist system build "extremism" faster than crusaders can handle. As long as men are confused and frightened by the social changes that threaten their livelihood and as long as they do not see the cause of their frustrations in the wages system, itself, they will look for scapegoats. The pains and repressions of capitalism will continue to boil over into hatred for minority groups. The fear of unemployment and the continual struggle to maintain wage rates at a mere subsistance level fan the flames of hatred among competing workers. For capitalism must always have fewer jobs than workers to handle them. Otherwise wage rates would rise beyond a point where it becomes profitable for the owners of wealth. In times of labor shortages, governments must introduce special legislation to counteract a potential working-class advantage, yet most workers have not yet learned the connection between "their" governments and the owners of the means and instruments of production. They are content to blame their fellow workers rather than to investigate the real cause of their misfortunes. And sections of the capitalist class, understanding the advantage to them, foster hatreds among the workers.

STATE-SPONSORED HATE

But the nature of hatred is not confined to workers within a country. The defense of capitalist interests, generally, demands the mobilization of emotions against an outside "enemy." Capitalist rivalries involve wars and preparations for war. The war mentality is a school of hate.