

921215
/470

Past Imperfect

French Intellectuals, 1944–1956

Tony Judt

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley / Los Angeles / Oxford

Communists, *knowing* that he would say nothing about Jewish victims of Communist persecution.⁴⁴

According to Simone de Beauvoir, all of this was a source of much agonizing for her partner, and we can probably believe her. Sartre, she reported, "never recovered from [n'encaissa pas]" the Prague trials, the Moscow "doctors' plot," the anti-Zionism of the PCF. He promised Mauriac that he would reply in his own time, a promise that he was able to abandon thanks to the death of Stalin. In other words, as de Beauvoir concludes, the departure of Stalin spared him the embarrassment of spoiling his relationship with his new-found Communist friends.⁴⁵ Sartre the existentialist might have argued that there are worse things in life than embarrassing one's friends or even oneself and that there are moments in history when an individual just must speak out, make a commitment to a position, and live the consequences. But Sartre the anti-anti-Communist thought otherwise. Once again, as in 1936, 1940, and throughout the Occupation years, he missed the opportunity to act decisively, to be consistent in his moral engagement. But that was his private tragedy. Anti-anticommunism, and everything it entailed, was the tragedy and dilemma of a generation.

44. Sartre, quoted by M-A Burnier, *Le Testament de Sartre* (Paris, 1982), 76; Étiemble, "Lettre ouverte à Jean-Paul Sartre," *Arts*, 24-30 July 1953, reprinted in *Littérature dégagée, 1942-1953* (Paris, 1955), 148. The third part of "Les Communistes et la paix" did not appear until April 1954.

45. De Beauvoir, *La Force des choses*, 312.

CHAPTER TEN

America Has Gone Mad *Anti-Americanism in Historical Perspective*

L'Amérique, dans les années quarante-cinquante, n'était pas tellement bien vue par les Européens, et par les Français en particulier . . . les Européens détestaient l'Amérique parce qu'ils se détestaient.

In the forties and fifties, America was not very much *liked* by Europeans, and by the French in particular . . . Europeans detested America because they detested *themselves*.

Claude Roy

Ever since the first Spanish missionaries agonized over the status of the "noble savages" they encountered in the New World, European thinkers have had mixed feelings about the Americas.¹ Entranced by its emptiness, its riches, its tabula rasa on which the world could be written anew, they have been simultaneously repelled by its crude simplicity, its newness, its very modernity. And of all the Europeans, the French in particular have exhibited these mixed emotions in their most acute form. From the Marquis de Lafayette to Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, they

1. Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge, 1982).

have found in America an energy, an openness, a protean possibility that they felt was lacking in the established habits and routines of their own society. But at the same time, others have turned away from it in distaste at its shallow culture and rapacious search for wealth and success. Very few French writers have taken the trouble, like Alexis de Tocqueville, to study and analyze, with a critical sympathy, the underlying shape and drive of the United States; but many of his fellow citizens have succeeded and imitated him in his anxiety in face of the American model, harbinger of an ambiguous future.²

By the mid-nineteenth century, *America* was already a synonym in certain French circles for whatever was disturbing or unfamiliar about the present. The criticism of a Pierre Buchez was understandable in the context of the utopian vision of the Christian socialist tradition: "It is solidly organized egoism, it is evil made systematic and regular, in a word it is the materialism of human destiny";³ but even here it is curious to catch the pessimistic, elegiac note, the sense that in one possible account of human history, the United States was a depressing warning of the future of Europe. More predictable in this respect was Edmond de Goncourt, commenting bleakly on the emerging Paris of the Baron Haussmann: "It makes me think of some American babylon of the future."⁴ By the end of the century this point of view was already enshrined in school textbooks—in one such manual published in 1904, it was asserted that "America is becoming the material pole of the world; for how long will Europe remain its intellectual and moral pole?"⁵

The parameters of the modern French view of the United States of America were thus already set before World War I (and long before most French writers had any direct experience of the place itself). America had the wealth and might well soon enough acquire power. It was thus the most modern of worlds, the human enterprise stripped of tradition and inhibition, of complexity and sophistication. Europe, by contrast, was

2. General histories of this topic include René Remond, *Les États-Unis devant l'opinion française, 1815–1852*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1962); Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La France et les États-Unis des origines à nos jours* (Paris, 1976); Denis Lacorne, Jacques Rupnik, and Marie-France Toinet, *L'Amérique dans les têtes* (Paris, 1986).

3. Pierre Buchez, quoted by Michel Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme, et fascisme en France* (Paris, 1990), 52.

4. Edmond de Goncourt in 1860, quoted by Deborah Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France* (Berkeley, 1989), 20.

5. E. Jaliffier, *Cours complet d'histoire*, cited by Jacques Portès, "Les États-Unis dans les manuels d'histoire et de géographie de la Troisième République (1871–1914)," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 28 (January–March 1981): 204.

already "old Europe," rich in ideas, in heritage, in culture and understanding. Either Europe's future lay in America (in which case all the worse for Europe), or else the struggle for the preservation of the values of the spirit would have to be undertaken against America. These sentiments were reinforced and given new significance by the Great War, which, in revealing the terrifying destructive power of technical and economic resources, also made of modernity an exponentially more frightening and immediate vision. Moreover, there were now very good grounds for associating modernity and the monopoly of material resources with the United States; of all the great powers, it alone emerged unscathed—indeed, strengthened—from the experience of conflict. The resented beneficiary of the war, it was now the natural target of both radical ideology and cultural pessimism.

But in the years after World War I "America" as the symbol of modernity, materialism, and bourgeois self-satisfaction became synonymous with a larger and more abstract target of suspicion, "the West." Here, too, a background remark is necessary. This was by no means the first occasion on which European intellectuals had formed a suspicious, dismissive dislike for their own world and looked longingly at some mysterious other. The fascination for China and with things Chinese had swept some Western nations during the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century many English, Germans, and French had been drawn into "Orientalism," the admiration for a half-understood mysterious world south and east of the Mediterranean.⁶ Russia, too, had become a source of curiosity for some Western writers in these years. Although it did not follow axiomatically that an interest in Asia must be accompanied by dismissal of the Western heritage, there was a natural inclination to adopt for oneself the attitudes of non-Europeans towards the European world. Thus the nineteenth-century czarist historians who cultivated the Slavophile dismissal of "the rotten West" were echoed by Western admirers. Until 1917, however, the flow of Western self-hatred was damned by the unappealing and manifestly unsatisfactory forms of government and social order that held sway nearly everywhere else in the world. It was one thing to admire the Slav soul or prefer Chinese art or Islamic theology; it was quite something else to imagine that the political future of humanity lay in the Forbidden City or the Sultan's harem.

The Russian Revolution changed all that. Accompanied in short order by the secularization of Turkey, the rise of Arab and Indian nation-

6. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

alism, the emergence of Japan as a regional power, and the rumors of revolution in China, it seemed to suggest that if the East contained a mystery, it was the riddle of the future, not the enigma of the past. Young radicals of the twenties, even if not themselves Communists, saw in the upheavals to the East an energy and a promise altogether missing from an exhausted, static Europe. In his first significant work, the twenty-five-year-old André Malraux captured the mood of his generation perfectly, as he compared the West unfavorably to the promises of a once-exotic East. The Surrealists, too, were caught up in the enthusiastic vision of Western decline (in Spengler's sense) and the coming age of the East; this is Louis Aragon, speaking a year before the publication of Malraux's *La Tentation de l'Occident*: "Western world, you are condemned to die. We are Europe's defeatists. . . . May the East, your terror, at last respond to our pleas."⁷

During the twenties, in the period of nonpolitical, cultural radicalism that marked the immediate postwar generation, most intellectuals had little use for communism and their interest in the East was largely aesthetic and theoretical. Certainly the East was somehow fresher and more promising than the West, but the exact sociohistorical attributes of East and West remained elusive. The end of the decade and the first signs of the "nonconformists" of the thirties saw an increasingly precise formulation of the critique of Western civilization, with a growing use of the word *America* as a shorthand for all that was undesirable or disturbing about Western life. This critique took various distinct forms, each more political and extreme than the previous one.

In the first place there was America-the-modern, the crude outrider of history. In many novels, essays, and films from the late twenties and early thirties, the United States appears sometimes as metaphor, sometimes as example of everything that is amiss or foreboding about the present. In *Mort de la pensée bourgeoise* (a title that could stand for many in these years), Emmanuel Berl treated the rise of American power and influence as synonymous with the decline of all that was worth saving in Western culture—"America is multiplying its territory, where the values of the West risk finding their grave."⁸ Two years earlier, André Siegfried had published a work devoted to the United States, in which he saw the

country much as Chaplin would depict it in *Modern Times*, a land where people are reduced to automatons, a horrific depiction of the future of us all: "We Westerners must each firmly denounce whatever is American in his house, his clothes, his soul."⁹

At first reading, this sounds like simple anti-Americanism, and the same is true of Berl's writing as well. But the clue lies in Siegfried's suggestion that we inspect our own behavior first. "America" is us, or rather it is a part of us, everything that threatens the past, its values, its spirit. This may sound reactionary but clearly was intended to convey quite the opposite message. Berl was young and an outspoken radical. So were Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, whose *Le Cancer américain*, published in 1931, was part of a critical diptych; the other half was *Décadence de la nation française*, also published in 1931. Taken together, these essays constitute not only a critique of productivism, anonymity, and modernity but also that demand for a moral, almost a sentimental revolution that gave this generation so much in common with its Fascist contemporaries abroad. Like Georges Duhamel's *Scènes de la vie future*, published in 1930, they saw in anything and everything American the evidence of a collapse of the specificities, the variety and depth, that had been the beauty and virtue of Western culture. Without them, it lost its redeeming features and was rotten, two-dimensional, ripe for revolution.

Some of these writers, Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu in particular, saw in "industrialism" the special sin of modernity and thus in American production techniques the epitome of the modern world in all its naked shame. This of course distinguished them from some Fascists and all Communists and connected them much more immediately to the sentimental fringe of reactionary politics. In France, as in Germany or Russia, there was an intimate relationship, forged in the Romantic era, between opposition to industrial society and nostalgia for earlier forms of authority and order. The counterpoint to this, utopian socialism and its various offspring in the anticapitalism of fin-de-siècle ruralists, was never as strong or popular, having been soundly defeated by urban socialist parties with their roots in an industrial labor movement. Thus those who saw in America the scourge of modern production and technology tended to be either implicitly conservative or else politically marginal. But this did not prevent them speaking for a significant intellectual

7. Aragon quoted by Pierre Astier, *Écrivains français engagés* (Paris, 1978), 89. See also André Malraux, *La Tentation de l'Occident* (Paris, 1926).

8. Emmanuel Berl, *Mort de la pensée bourgeoise* (1929; reprint Paris, 1970), 76-77.

9. André Siegfried, *Les États-Unis d'aujourd'hui*, quoted in Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme, et fascisme*, 57.

constituency. Even Raymond Aron in these years could quote with approval Bertrand Russell's assertion that the great task of the epoch was humanity's struggle against industrial civilization.¹⁰

In this context, the otherwise awkward figure of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry fits right in. Despite his own fascination with modern machinery, he looked upon industrial society as the generator of a profound spiritual emptiness, a universe in which human beings were lost, their individuality submerged in the totalizing tendencies evinced by *all* the major nations and systems of the era. German nazism, Soviet communism, and (especially) American capitalism were in this respect utterly alike for him, as for many others; Mounier's mysterious "personalism" operated from similar premises. France, he believed, was afflicted with the industrial disease, the American cancer, but still carried signs of hope and life. Hence Saint-Exupéry's willingness to fight for it still: "I shall thus oppose anyone seeking to impose one custom over others, one people over other peoples, one race over other races, one style of thought over all others."¹¹ Like the English, many French saw their country as struggling alone to preserve this individuality, this autonomy, in the face of the onslaught of the modern and the totalitarian.

During the thirties, however, there emerged a further and more distinctively ideological version of anti-Americanism, which associated the United States with capitalism and thus opposed it no longer in the name of anti-Western, much less anti-industrial sentiment but on behalf of an alternative modernity, the promise of Oriental redemption now associated with communism. Because communism was, as Saint-Exupéry and others noted, an ideology and a system as anti-individual and totalizing as "America," its appeal in these years was self-restricting; many progressive intellectuals found American and Soviet emphasis on production and material transformation similar and equally repulsive. But Soviet communism in the thirties was able to trade not so much perhaps on specifically anti-American sentiment as on anti-Western emotions of the kind already taking shape a decade before. Not only did it represent the future (for Marxists and many non-Marxists alike) but it was, from 1935, an active protagonist in defense of the present against the combined threat of fascism and reaction. Moreover, and after 1918 this was a strong

point in its favor, the Soviet Union was part of the underprivileged of the international community, one of the many nations that had lost the First World War, whatever side they had been on.

For most French observers, the real winners in 1918 had been the "Anglo-Saxons." Perfidious diplomacy and raw financial power had made of the United States and Great Britain the only unambiguous beneficiaries of the postwar treaties. (Of course the British saw things differently and regarded the United States alone as having monopolized the economic benefits of victory.) Thus, for the first time in France there surfaced a vision of "Anglo-Saxon capitalism," a sort of international predator against whom France somehow metamorphosed into at best a fawning jackal, at worst a virtual proletarian nation. Hitherto the Left had treated all capitalism as international, all capitalists as equal in their interests and their crimes. But the tortured French psyche of the interwar years transposed the sins of capitalism onto foreigners in general and the Anglo-Saxons in particular. There would be many in the Resistance who vociferously asserted their intention of liberating France from the yoke of international Anglo-Saxon capital, even as they were engaged in a life-and-death struggle with collaborators who thought they were doing the same thing.

Finally, and in close if distorted relation to the forms already discussed, there was that variant of interwar anti-Americanism that made an implicit, or with growing frequency explicit, association between America and Jews. The roots of this prejudice also trace back to earlier decades: for very good reasons, Jews were associated with modernity in the European mind, in the sense that the free circulation of Jews in society, the opportunity for Jews to play an active and prominent role in public life, were the direct product of that Archimedean point of departure of the modern world, the great French Revolution. Whereas capitalism and industry might be metaphors for modernity, or three-dimensional symbols of it, the emancipation of the Jews of Europe was one of the defining acts of the modern era, emblematic of the rationality of enlightened thought and its incarnation in modern government and law. It was thus both logical and quite astute of those for whom modernity was the problem to treat the presence of Jews as its most telling and troubling symptom. Jews (like Americans) were rootless, connected only to their means of livelihood and to the present. Because taste and appreciation were the work of centuries of national and popular culture, Jews (like Americans) necessarily lacked taste and refinement; their access to wealth, however, broke the natural bond between material power and

10. Raymond Aron, quoted by Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle* (Paris, 1988), 592. The original source of the quotation was Henri de Man. Ernst Robert Curtius, in the twenties, described French nerves as "surtendus par l'américanisation de la vie moderne." See his *Essai sur la France* (1932; reprint Paris, 1990), 101.

11. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Pilote de guerre* (Paris, 1942), 143.

cultural authority so that (like Americans) they could now pollute Western culture with their purchasing power and their preferences.

This was no extremist, fringe prejudice. Edouard Drumont's commentary on the Eiffel Tower, "this stupid witness to modern life . . . that will prove such a boon to the Jewish industrialist,"¹² could have been made by any number of people, and probably was. Anti-Semitism was respectable on both sides of the political divide right up until 1944, and many of those writers who expressed distaste at Jews and what they stood for would have been horrified to be accused of prejudice, much less racism or incitement to genocide. Gide was no philo-Semite for all his Dreyfusard engagement, and Georges Bernanos, who wrote with such acerbity of Catholic atrocities in civil-war Spain, had published an influential book only a few years earlier in which he not only praised the heritage and influence of Drumont but explicitly associated anti-Semitism with its respectable twin, anti-Americanism.¹³ Paul Faure and the large minority within the SFIO who opposed Léon Blum after 1937 never made any secret of their latent anti-Semitic feelings and could indulge them precisely because there was a long tradition, dating at least to Proudhon, of conflating anti-Semitism with anticapitalism. Now that capitalism was increasingly treated as distinctively and primarily American, the circle was complete. For Blum to favor standing up to Hitler, at the risk of war, suggested his willingness as a Jew to sympathize with the interests of Anglo-Saxon economic imperialism. By 1940 very little distinguished the extreme fringe of such Munichois socialists in France from the thinking of a Robert Brasillach. What separates us from America? Brasillach asked in an essay written early in the war. The answer is threefold: its hypocrisy (a frequent charge), its dollars, and international Jewry. As the last bastion of Jewish power in the world, the United States was the enemy of revolutionaries and reactionaries, anti-modernists and socialists alike.¹⁴

Although the war and the occupation changed the terms of politics for the Left, the intelligentsia of Vichy continued to operate in the same vein. Thus the initial appeal of Vichy to many antirepublican intellectuals cannot readily be dissociated from both the anti-American and anti-Semitic language that permeated the regime.¹⁵ It was one of de

Gaulle's weaknesses in his struggle against Pétain that he was so dependent on the "Anglo-Saxons"; resisters and collaborators alike had little good to say about these. The British had let the French down in 1940, bombed their fleet, and now sat secure behind their maritime barrier. Continuing the struggle could only serve the interests of the Americans and the British, and in the eyes of the left wing of the Resistance itself it made little sense to liberate France from fascism if it was only to be handed back to the incompetent bourgeoisie who had brought about its collapse, now even more beholden to foreign capital.

Thus the war was less of a break and a divide than might be supposed. Anti-Semitism lost its respectability, but in a complicated paradox, anti-Americanism was exacerbated. There were many reasons for this: in simple terms there was resentment at the United States for its wartime bombing of French cities (Royan, Le Havre), for its de facto occupation of France during the months of liberation, for what was seen as American plenty in the midst of French penury, for its postwar monopoly of wealth and power, and for its hegemony within a Western alliance that many French would rather not have joined.¹⁶

In a more complex syndrome of frustration and impotence (which the British shared, but to a much smaller extent), the French, intellectuals especially, resented the very fact that they had been liberated by the Americans, resented their humiliated postwar status and more particularly the need to go cap in hand to Washington for assistance with French reconstruction. The Russians, by contrast, could be admired and appreciated from afar. The diplomatic nadir would be reached in 1948, but long before then the decline in French international standing was evident to all. In the winter of 1946 Léon Blum went to Washington to secure emergency American help and a reduction or liquidation of French war debts. The price he paid for this, in the Blum-Byrnes accords of May 1946, was a lowering of tariffs and other economic barriers, as a result of which France was to be exposed to more American products, material and cultural, than ever before. Coming on the heels of generalized disillusion with the Fourth Republic and disappointment at the failed aspirations of the Resistance, this American "invasion" made the United States the natural target for all those—and they were many—who needed to hate someone in the grim postwar years.

12. On Drumont, see Michel Winock, *Edouard Drumont et Cie* (Paris, 1982), passim.

13. Georges Bernanos, *La Grande Peur des Bien-Pensants* (Paris, 1931).

14. See Robert Brasillach, *Journal d'un homme occupé* (Paris, 1955), 438, 445.

15. For example, see P-A Cousteau, *L'Amérique juive* (Paris, 1942).

16. In the spring of 1945, 59 percent of those polled thought the availability of food was worse than before the Liberation; 79 percent said they were worse off than six months earlier. See Hilary Footitt and John Simmonds, *France, 1943-1945* (London, 1988), 213.

To these new considerations must be added elements of continuity. Although an aversion to the modern was not revived in its earlier shape, it persisted in a new form. The enthusiasm for modern German thought that had so characterized younger writers during the thirties was now thoroughly incorporated into the indigenous French variant; among its central props was the Heideggerian distaste for "technical civilization." Although French existential philosophy did not pay to this side of Heidegger the same attention he would receive from his Central European readers, the subterranean presence of this dimension of his thought is unmistakable.¹⁷ In many of the expressions of distaste for American culture and its dehumanizing impact, in much of the sympathy expressed for Communist campaigns against modern production and products there is the distinct echo of the discourse of the thirties. Alexandre Kojève, in his declining years, mused that humankind, if tormented by the desire to act when there was nothing left to do, could always in the last resort "live like Americans." Even some anti-Communists shared this sentiment; Georges Bernanos devoted many of his last writings in the forties to warnings against the despotism of technology, the robotic civilizations looming over the horizon from West and East alike.¹⁸ The true enemy was the "productivist spirit" itself.

In this sense, Claude Roy was quite correct to see in French dislike for the Americans a sublimated self-hatred. The productivist obsessions of the postwar years, which characterized Communists no less than others, at least until 1948, seemed to many to be turning France away, for good or ill, from its traditions, its habits, its true self. The "personalist" revolution of Mounier's dreams was threatened, he wrote in 1946, more by the United States than by anything else, the Soviet Union included.¹⁹ Ten years later, his editorial successors at *Esprit* remained firmly fixed in this opinion:

We reproach Socialist ideology with idealizing man and being blind to his fallibility, but the average American is blinder still. What can one expect from this civilization that mocks and caricatures Western spiritual traditions and is propelling mankind into a horizontal existence, shorn of transcendence and depth?²⁰

17. For an example of the Central European reading of Heidegger, with an emphasis on his debt to Husserl, see the work of Jan Patočka, for example, *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago, 1989).

18. See the various writings collected in Georges Bernanos, *Français si vous sachiez, 1945-1948* (Paris, 1961).

19. Emmanuel Mounier, "L'Homme américain," *Esprit*, November 1946.

20. Editorial, "Les Flammes de Budapest," *Esprit*, December 1956, 773.

This was no isolated commentary. Throughout this period, *Esprit* in particular would spice its columns with disparaging remarks about American culture and almost as a matter of form would temper any criticism of Communist society with a patronizing or dismissive reminder of the greater spiritual threat across the Atlantic. Thus, an editorial in 1952 reminded its readers, "From the outset we have denounced in these pages the risk posed to our country by an American culture that attacks at their roots the originality, the mental and moral cohesion of Europe."²¹ By comparison, the Soviet threat was puny indeed.

From such quarters, however, views of this sort were perhaps to be expected—the slightly suffocating air of moral superiority that wafted across the pages of *Esprit* (or of *Le Monde*, whose editor disliked the Communists but despised the United States) was always likely to make it unreceptive to the charms of "the American way of life." Similarly, it comes as no surprise to find Maurice Merleau-Ponty discovering that he had more in common with the Communists, in theory and despite everything, than with the Americans—"All in all, man's appreciation of man and a classless society are less vague, as the principles of a global policy, than American prosperity."²² Of more enduring interest, perhaps, are the opinions of François Mauriac, who could not be accused of even the mildest of philo-Soviet motives. Mauriac, like Thierry Maulnier before him, felt no need to go to the United States in order to decide what he thought of it—by the end of the fifties "the American way of life" was simultaneously alien and familiar: "This nation . . . is more foreign to me than any other. I've never been there . . . what is the point? It has done more than just visit us; it has transformed us."²³

Mauriac did not come by his views in a hurry. Like de Gaulle, his distaste for things American was rooted in his culture, his religion, and his sense of the importance (and the decline) of his country. Although he was too intelligent not to appreciate the strategic inevitability of American presence in postwar Europe and never gave himself to the more extreme forms of resentment evinced by his colleagues, he was on more than one occasion sympathetic to their mood. In September 1950 he noted with some empathy an outburst from Claude Bourdet in *L'Obs-*

21. Editorial, *Esprit*, June 1952.

22. Merleau-Ponty, quoted by Olivier Mongin, "Les Conditions d'une interprétation: Merleau-Ponty et Claude Lefort," in Evelyn Pisier-Kouchner, ed., *Les Interprétations du Stalinisme* (Paris, 1983), 315.

23. François Mauriac, *L'Express*, 29 August 1959.

vateur (one of many such): "France is getting ever more committed to the unstable, impulsive, sometimes hysterical American camp. . . ." "Hysterical, unstable, impulsive"—there is an advance echo here of Sartre's suggestion that "America has gone mad," although Bourdet was writing long before the dénouement of the Rosenberg affair. Mauriac's language was more moderate, but the idea that there was something uncontrolled, shallow, and unreliable about America was one he shared.²⁴

One reason for this was that, like Bourdet, he was growing more preoccupied with the looming colonial crisis. This made him progressively more critical of France's own governments but also very sensitive to the moral standing of France's critics from abroad. The issue festered throughout the Vietnam years but came to a head at the time of Suez. Who on earth are the Americans, Mauriac wrote in October 1956, to criticize French colonialist behavior? Not only have they practiced a colonialism of their own to good effect, but in order to do so they were not above resorting to genocide: "Are we reduced to taking lessons from this great exterminating nation?"²⁵ Some of those who, unlike Mauriac, remained committed to France's colonial destiny would invoke the risks of handing the former colonies over to others—Jacques Soustelle feared that an independent Algeria would fall into Arab nationalist, Communist, or American hands, probably all three in quick succession. This idea, that decolonization was a zero-sum game among great powers, in which France's loss would be the Americans' gain, was widespread at the time.²⁶

Thus the shift in intellectuals' attention after 1956, from communism to anticolonialism, entailed no abandoning of anti-Western and anti-American sentiment. But whereas anti-American feeling in earlier years turned on more abstract and metaphysical conceptions of high culture or the human condition, the West was now charged with the much more concrete and demonstrable failings of imperialism and racism. On these issues, French intellectuals shared a broad measure of agreement. Étiemble, a critic who was otherwise pitiless in his attacks on the confused thinking of his progressive colleagues, not only agreed with them that America was a worthless civilization whose highest achievement was the *Reader's Digest* but also warned Americans against presuming to offer advice to the French on how to live. Writing at the time of widely held

anxiety about impending atomic war, he suggested, "Rather than promising what might be an all-too-perfect, even eternal repose," Americans should look to their own sins. The treatment of Negroes was alone sufficient to disqualify the United States from proffering lessons in morality or *savoir-vivre*.²⁷ He did not go as far as Mounier, or the Abbé Boulier, who warned against condemning communism for fear of bringing comfort to the "imperialists," but he did espouse their claim that only those with "clean hands" could speak out.²⁸

This question of the clean conscience troubled many in this decade. In the immediate postwar years, America seemed annoyingly guilt-free, untroubled by Europe's complicated and ambivalent past. It was this combination of a clean conscience and technological resources that would, Mounier thought, be the Americans' strongest suit in their drive to world domination, and thus not surprisingly it was with some glee that he, Sartre, and others devoted their time and their journals to demonstrating just how dirty the Americans' hands really were. Arthur Koestler protested that one did not have to be pure and without sin in order to see and denounce the greater sins of others, but his was a lonely voice in these years.²⁹ The injustices perpetrated within the United States and exported abroad in the baggage train of the Marshall Plan were invoked to excuse its critics from turning their attention to injustice elsewhere. One further reason for this was that its postwar domination of western Europe gave a perverted plausibility to the suggestion that the United States had somehow become the heir to the Nazis. In this light, not only was it incumbent on all progressive thinkers to direct their fire at the Americans, but even the latter's would-be allies found themselves in a delicate position.

The French Communists were adept at exploiting this situation. Like their comrades in Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, among others, they proposed themselves as the heirs to a national bourgeoisie that had failed in its task and surrendered to foreign and Fascist domination. They conflated the hitherto distinctive political languages of party, class, and nation into a single vocabulary, initially deployed against Germans but available for exploitation, with virtually no change, against the new occupiers and their local collaborators.³⁰ Intellectuals and non-Communist politicians whose own Resistance-era credentials were thin

24. Claude Bourdet is quoted by François Mauriac, *Mémoires politiques* (Paris, 1967), 400.

25. Mauriac, *Bloc-Notes, 1952-1957* (Paris, 1958), 12 October 1956.

26. See Paul Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1977), 79.

27. See Étiemble's contributions to *Les Temps modernes* during 1948 and 1949, reprinted in *Littérature dégagée, 1942-1953* (Paris, 1955), 76ff.

28. The Abbé Boulier is cited by François Fejtö, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1986), 213.

29. See, for example, Arthur Koestler, *The Trail of the Dinosaur* (New York, 1955), 51.

30. See Lily Marcou, *Le Cominform* (Paris, 1977), 51, n. 16.

thus took comfort in such terminology. At first sight, the analogy that was drawn with Nazi Germany may seem incredible, but it secreted a certain logic. For a man like Julien Benda, who had espoused a lifelong antipathy to Germany, even the defeat of Hitler was no guarantee of success. German ideas might yet triumph in other hands. In the postwar years there was no longer a Germany across the Rhine to hate and fear; but there was an American government that was consciously and deliberately reviving its half of the old German empire, the better to oppose and block the revolutionary ambitions of the Soviet Union.³¹

Until 1948 these sentiments were muted. The postwar settlement was still in flux, many French politicians of the center as well as the Left were seeking to obtain American and British support for a thorough dismantling of the German state, and Russians and Americans were still engaged in negotiations, however unfriendly and unproductive. But once the divisions hardened, the Marshall Plan was approved, the American plan for a revived German republic presented, and French dreams of neutrality shattered, the interchangeability of Americans and Germans became common currency in many circles. The Communists now bluntly asserted the common identity of old and new occupiers. France was again an "occupied country"; the influence of American culture and capital was as pervasive and pernicious as had been that of the Nazis in the thirties and forties, and the task of all true Frenchmen was to "resist."³² Such analogies fell on fertile soil. *Esprit*, *Observateur*, and especially *Témoignage Chrétien* displayed steady hostility to anything and everything American in the years 1948–53; economic aid, the Berlin airlift, Nato, the Korean War, the proposals for a European defense force, and the rearming of Germany were treated not merely as political or military errors, nor even as evidence of an American desire to extend and secure its economic influence. More than this, they were written and spoken about as confirmation of the Americans' drive to occupy and humiliate Europe, and France especially.

By an interesting transposition, the very modernization of France came to be seen by some as a trick; if the most modern society of all, the United States, was now the occupier, any indigenous French efforts to transform the economy or reconstruct economic and political life could

31. Julien Benda, in *Les Lettres françaises*, 23 December 1944.

32. Thus Pierre Daix drew an analogy between American cinema and its influence and that of the Nazi propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl. See *Les Lettres françaises*, 28 October 1948.

only be to the advantage of the Americans. Thus, according to Simone de Beauvoir, Mendès-France and "le mendésisme" sought merely to "improve" capitalism and colonialism from a technocratic perspective. They were but puppets. Looking back in her memoirs, she was still asserting from the vantage point of the early sixties, "It was in fact nothing but a spruced-up Right."³³ As to France's participation in a reconstructed Europe, "the European myth" was dismissed as nothing more than an American ploy to restore German power as a counterweight to the legitimate authority and influence of the Soviet Union in the East. The failure of the Liberation was now firmly if anachronistically placed on Washington's doorstep. Hardly had a humiliated and exhausted France fought its way out of one occupation than it was subjected to another, more complete, more damaging, and against which a spiritual resistance was thus morally incumbent upon all.

It is perhaps worth noting that such anti-American sentiment was most frequent in the intellectual milieu. One opinion poll of 1953 found that the highly educated segment of the French population was also the one most likely to be critical of the United States, which is perhaps to be expected but merits reflection. After all, economic problems and political uncertainty were universal, and the power and privileges of the United States were as obvious to the least-informed worker as they were to the most sophisticated scholar or journalist. The shadow of America was everywhere in these years. Nowhere was this more abundantly obvious than in the film industry, commonly cited by critics as evidence of the American invasion. During the Vichy years, French films had dominated the domestic market for the first time since World War I, American and other foreign entertainment being largely banned. But from 1946 the importation of American films (including many third-rate productions, which had accumulated during the war years) grew apace: in the first six months of that year just 36 American films were distributed in France; for the equivalent period in 1947 the number had reached 338. For most of the decade to come, American-made films constituted over 50 percent of the total number in distribution and secured around 43 percent of the viewing public. Most of these films had no redeeming value (the American cinema of the thirties had been distinctly better), and many of them were extraordinarily banal and simple-minded. Where they were not straightforwardly nationalistic or anti-Communist,

33. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses* (Paris, 1963), 340.

they were little more than unsubtle advertisements for the least interesting aspects of modern American life.³⁴

Nonetheless, a steady diet of Rita Hayworth, Coca-Cola, and overpaid American soldiers does not seem to have had unduly distorting effects upon the common French perception of the United States and its relationship with France. The same public that had resented being liberated and "occupied" by the Americans was quite clear by 1948 that U.S. aid was vital to French national recovery. This did not make the United States universally popular: despite the fact that in 1950 it was the foreign country that most people *liked* more than any other, it was also the one with the highest negative coefficient: more people also actively *disliked* it than disliked any other country, Germany included. But except for the young and the highly educated, the French were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the United States in general even as they feared and resented its economic power and were opposed to some of its foreign policies, including support for a renascent Federal Republic in Germany. In 1953, 61 percent of those asked were "sympathetic" to the United States, only 8 percent expressing "antipathy," 5 percent "distrust," and 1 percent "hate." It is thus worth noting that a sizable percentage of the Communist electorate had no apparent dislike for Washington—only 10 percent of all persons questioned would have favored a Franco-Soviet alliance.³⁵

On this issue more than any other, then, the intellectual community was isolated from the rest of the country. There is a certain logic to this. One of the distinctive and enduring differences between France and the United States has been the insignificance of the intelligentsia in the public life of the latter. In marked contrast to their French homologues, American intellectuals are marginal to their own culture. For a multitude of reasons, the intellectual in America has no purchase upon the public mind, not to mention public policy. Thus there was (and remains) about the United States something profoundly inimical and alien to the European and French conception of the intellectual and his or her role. If "America" represented the future, then it pointed to a society in which the role of the intellectual, real as well as self-ascribed, would be dramati-

34. Patricia Hubert-Lacombe, "L'Accueil des films américains en France pendant la guerre froide (1946–1953)," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 36 (April–June 1986). One result of this wave of American films was to generate some quiet nostalgia for the cultural protectionism of the Vichy years.

35. "Enquête sur les sentiments et attitudes des Français à l'égard des Américains," *Sondages* 2 (January–February 1953): 6–7, 30–32, 52–56.

cally reduced. The contrast with the Soviet Union, which presented itself as a society in which the intellectual, the artist, the scientist played a respected and vital role, was thus particularly marked in this respect. In this as in other ways, the USSR seemed profoundly *European*. To oppose America and its way of life was thus among many other things an act of enlightened self-interest on the part of the European intellectual, a defensive move on behalf of an idealized *European* West in the face of the alien version held out from across the ocean. If *that* was the future of the West, then better the East, which offered values instead of technique, commitment instead of isolation, hope and struggle instead of satisfaction and prosperity. That some of the East European show trials made a point of emphasizing just these themes was, therefore, a further argument in their favor.³⁶

The apparently marginal position of French intellectuals with respect to America was not a problem at the time. Most intellectuals were astonishingly unfamiliar with opinion (and indeed life) outside of their own rather restricted cultural and social world. When they looked for workers, they found Communists. When they sought an echo of their views and the impact of their views, they found it in a plethora of journals directed primarily to them and them alone. Although they did not normally realize this, the intellectual community of Paris was almost as hermetic and as divorced from the nation as that of London or even New York. But most important of all, French intellectuals wore their very marginality as a badge of honor. Sometimes, with the early Sartre, they made a sort of self-lacerating virtue of their own isolation; later, and also with Sartre, some of them would seek to lose their identity in engagement. But even in the latter case the engagement itself was an action intended to overcome the existential condition of intellectual life and thus made of that lonely, marginal condition the central theme of the intellectual's experience.

These characteristics had marked the intelligentsia ever since it first became conscious of its own existence. What distinguished modern intellectuals from their Romantic, bohemian, Dreyfusard, or non-conformist predecessors was this: whereas the latter had nearly always made a virtue of their condition, postwar intellectuals, in their anti-Americanism as in so much else, no longer trusted to their own judgment. It was not sufficient now that the "modern" was aesthetically

36. See, for example, the indictment in the *Trial of the American Spies in Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1950), 116, where the victims are accused of a "servile undervaluation of the East."

unpleasing or spiritually unworthy. It had also to be in some demonstrable, "objective" sense false, wrong. The formal measure of this was the good or ill it brought or would bring to the masses, but it did not follow from this that the general enthusiasm of the masses for things American therefore constituted a hurdle. In place of the mass of the population, with its unreliable and contradictory opinions, there was substituted instead a hypostasized and coherent Working People, in whose name the otherwise self-abnegating intellectual could pass judgments. For *these* people, America was a threat. To *this* mass of working persons, Western values were a hypocrisy. In the implicit name of *their* interests, progress and the progressive position could be identified and followed. To this Elysian Billancourt of the mind we must now direct our attention.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

We Must Not Disillusion the Workers

*On the Self-Abnegation and
Elective Affinities of the Intellectual*

*Un homme peut adhérer au Parti
Communiste sans accord ni sur la
doctrine, ni sur les moyens, par simple
désir de rompre, de couper les ponts avec
la bourgeoisie, de se sentir lié à une classe.*

A man may join the Communist party without agreeing with either its doctrine or its methods, from a simple desire to break away, to burn bridges with the bourgeoisie, to feel himself linked to a class.

Roger Stéphane

The petite bourgeoisie, it is said, is the class everyone loves to hate. Of the intellectuals it might be said that they are the class that loves to hate itself. Ever since the category *intellectual* came into common usage, one part of the identity of the intellectual has been the aspiration (like that of the working class, according to Flaubert) to disappear. The sense of being peripheral, of being a commentator on the margins of society, has haunted the European intelligentsia for nearly two centuries. Once the idea took root, beginning with the Saint-Simonians, that society was divided into useful and useless classes, there has been an unbroken tradi-

tion of intellectual self-abnegation, a desire to merge with or work for the useful class, to be at one with progress and History, to change the world and not merely understand it. For obvious reasons, this sentiment has been most forcefully expressed on the progressive wing of politics: long before Stalin imposed on intellectuals the duty to abase themselves before the party line, the engaged and affiliated intelligentsia of the European Left saw in their alliance with the labor movement an opportunity to submerge their own cumbersome identity in that of the masses. The apparent paradox, that the European socialist and labor movement was conceived and led by middle-class intellectuals, is thus no paradox at all.

Indeed, the belief that intellectuals should cast their lot with the workers was from the beginning part of a larger conception of the proletariat as in some sense the "true" intelligentsia. It was Jaurès, not Gramsci, who first mooted the idea that the intellectual in capitalist society must identify with the concerns of the working classes not on self-denying, altruistic grounds but because it was the instinctive idealism, the necessarily transcendent interests and vision of the proletariat that made it the true intellectual class.¹ The Gramscian conception of the "organic intellectual" was a logical corollary to this argument, deriving its strength from the specific circumstances of Italy, but by the early twentieth century the line of reasoning thus implied was universally acknowledged within the European Left, from Saint Petersburg to Paris. There remained, however, an unresolved ambivalence as to the precise function of bourgeois intellectuals in these circumstances: should they continue to operate qua intellectual or should they deny altogether any claim to superior knowledge and moral authority and submit instead to the will of the organic and collective intelligence of the revolutionary movement?

Within the French context, this tension between the intellectual-as-revolutionary and the intellectual as ally or ancillary to the true revolutionary movement became more acute between the wars. On the one hand the indigenous *ouvriérisme* (workerism) of the French and the markedly popular (or at least populist) nature of the local Communist leadership meant that the PCF and international communism generally were simultaneously attractive and repulsive to progressive intellectuals. The dominant trends within the radical, or dissenting, intelligentsia were aesthetic and apolitical. Surrealism, and artistic and literary innovation in general, were the major forms of radical and countercultural

1. Jaurès is quoted in Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France, de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris, 1986), 26.

expression for the post-World War I generation. On the other hand, especially after 1932, the isolated oppositional intellectual was an ambiguous figure, as likely to be sympathetic to fascism as to Marxism or communism. The sarcastic antibourgeois anger of Nizan might draw him to the PCF, but similar sentiments in many of his contemporaries led them to look longingly at the "proletarian fascism" of Mussolini.

Fascism and communism both played on the guilt and vulnerability of intellectuals, challenging them to follow through on their antibourgeois sentiments and cast their lot with the movement of action, of change, of rejection. Paul Vaillant-Couturier appealed, on behalf of the Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires, for support and participation from writers and others who wished to "struggle alongside the proletariat"; but similar appeals to artists and intellectuals went out from Fascist movements and regimes, which organized congresses and festivals at which intellectuals could share the energy and optimism of the masses, in contrast with their own sense of cultural pessimism and social isolation. There was, however, an important difference. The intellectuals who were drawn to the extremist movements and regimes of the radical Right may have sought to give to their life and times a purpose and a meaning but did not usually desire to lose their identity in the common struggle. On the contrary, the Fascist intellectual was more like a mercenary, an outrider, at the service of people and movements with whom he or she had little or nothing in common. There was a distinctive masochist aspect to this, a desire to see derided and destroyed the very world of which one was also a product and beneficiary. But this was frequently accompanied by a nostalgia for a different world of authority and values and hierarchy, which the Fascist masses and their thuggish leaders might help bring about but which would not be theirs to inherit. The Fascist intellectual, in other words, continued to believe in the role of the intellectual.²

Here, then, communism and fascism parted company. Although there is some justice in the view that Louis Aragon and Lucien Rebatet, for example, had more in common than they might have cared to admit—in their scorn for the bourgeoisie, its bland moralism, and its material achievements—the distinctions remain important.³ Fascist

2. See Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism* (London, 1971); and Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After* (London, 1978), 197.

3. See the comparison proposed by Étiemble, *Littérature dégagée, 1942–1953* (Paris, 1955), 202.

intellectuals like Rebatet, Drieu, or Brasillach maintained, so they insisted, an aesthetic and political autonomy. They *chose* to be Fascists, and in making this choice, they were, as they thought, consistent with their vocation as intellectuals. Progressive intellectuals, however, including those in the thirties who chose to support but not join the Communist party, were forced to see themselves as breaking with their vocation, swept by history and necessity rather than by choice into a movement whose goals they shared but which asked of them that they abandon their autonomous intellectual identity. In certain cases the contrast is illustrated in their subsequent work. The would-be Fascist intellectual might draw on Fascist themes, but his political affiliation imposed no aesthetic straitjacket.⁴ Progressive intellectuals, by contrast, strove to write or speak, to practice their art, if not from the point of view of the proletariat then at least in harmony with its presumed interests and needs. Where they could not do this, where they found it impossible to derive an aesthetic from the yet-to-be-established values of a classless society, they were in an uncomfortable, alienated, and divided condition.

The self-abnegation of the progressive intellectual took various forms. Common to all of these was the admiration for strength, "purity," and the simple verities, missing in the traditionally complex and ambivalent stance of the intellectual but found by many in the proletariat and its party. Some of this was an inheritance from the ambiguous extremism of the thirties (notice the similarities between Sartre and Drieu in their dislike of weakness and softness—the latter's scorn for modern man with his "feeble muscles and fat belly" echoed by Sartre's yearning for violence and action), but much, too, was owed to the image of the Communist Resistance. Even in their criticisms of the PCF, sympathetic commentators yearned for its former firmness—"One would have liked the party of the working class to show itself in the electoral battle what it was during the Occupation: the party of purity and firmness [le Parti de la dureté et de la pureté]." Thus Jean Foresta in 1947 bemoaned the Communists' apparent compromises with bourgeois society.⁵ Communist intellectuals themselves would also look to the simple strengths of Communist (working) man; casting around for an illustration of André Marty's utter

4. An exception is architects, who were obliged to conform to the grandiose self-image of the regime, at least in their public commissions.

5. See Jean Foresta, "La Crise du communisme en France," *Esprit*, October 1947, 603.

isolation and an incontrovertible proof of his sins, Annie Besse described a section meeting that followed the party's criticism of its erstwhile hero: after the report from the Central Committee, she assured her readers, a simple worker stood up and announced that he no longer loved the name Marty, "and speaking thus, the Communist worker clenched his fists."⁶

The ridiculous bathos of this scene and the transparent seriousness with which it is recorded and presented capture well the two-pronged thrust of progressive *ouvriérisme*: an unabashed admiration for the worker in all his simple strength and an utter abdication of critical perspective on the part of the intellectual. "Pur et dur," the worker and the worker's party exercised a magnetic and unimpeachable appeal. Even at his most critical, Sartre was willing to defend the achievements of *Hungarian* Social Democrats, in contrast with the petit-bourgeois underachievers of the SFIO—the Hungarians, he wrote in 1956, were at least "hard Socialists."⁷ Here the instinctive preference for the exotic over the domestic combines with the self-despising admiration of the weak for the strong. Éluard, too, was not immune to such sentiments. Visiting Romania in 1948 (a country impoverished and divided by decades of dictatorship and war), he claimed to find that "sunshine of happiness" missing in the miserable, mirthless, gray world of his native France. In Romania he found certainty, energy, strength. In France, an ambivalent lassitude.⁸

There were two ways in which the intellectual could be at one with the workers. The first was to treat the working class as an elite community, a "chosen people," from whom one would not be separated, no matter how strong the temptation nor how difficult the path. This had been Mounier's position even before the war ended; commenting on the prospects for a revolution in postwar France, he recalled the earlier failure of the Girondins and blamed it on their "lack of contact" with the masses. It was not that the latter were politically infallible, he wrote, nor that they conferred infallibility on all who allied with them but that they, the working people, bore and nourished that political instinct without which ideas and good intentions were vain and impotent.⁹ From this

6. Annie Besse, "Sur l'humanisme socialiste," *Nouvelle Critique* 45 (April–May 1953): 44.

7. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le Fantôme de Staline," *Les Temps modernes* 129–31 (January–March 1957): 610.

8. "Je viens d'un pays où l'on ne rit plus, où l'on ne chante pas. La France est dans l'ombre. Mais vous avez découvert le soleil du bonheur." Éluard is quoted in Jean Rounault, "Aragon, Elsa, Éluard à Bucarest," *Preuves* 14 (April 1952): 38.

9. Mounier, "Suite française," *Esprit*, December 1944, 24.

position he never deviated; two years later, in 1946, he warned against cutting oneself off from the proletariat (that "elite of action"), which would be a criminal move, destructive of everything in which we believe. Just as we need the workers, so they need us. "Builders of cities" were essential to the coming revolution, but so were "forgers of men." True, the Communist party might appear to constitute a barrier, preventing communication between progressive thinkers and the working people, but this must not be allowed to impede progress; we must not "allow ourselves to be cut off from the proletariat because some administration refuses us a visa." Accordingly, two new columns were promised for the pages of *Esprit* in 1950: "News of the Downtrodden" (*Chronique des écrasés*), reporting on cases of injustice towards the poor and defenseless; and a page devoted to "Proletarian reality," in which any readers who were in contact with the "real world of the worker" were invited to communicate their insights to the journal.¹⁰

This earnest determination to align with the proletariat under all circumstances did not die with Mounier. His successors were no less committed. In January 1953, and in the teeth of the Slánsky trial and the accompanying signs of Communist intransigence and worse, Jean-Marie Domenach reaffirmed his position and that of his journal and its readers: "Theoretically and in practice, we seek to share in the rise of the masses, in the coming of a civilization of labor."¹¹ This is the authentic voice of early nineteenth-century Christian Socialism and its Saint-Simonist sources. It differed from the stance of the party intellectual only in this significant respect: for the affiliated Communist the idea that the party might constitute a barrier to communication with the proletariat was unthinkable. In other ways, however, the progressive intellectual and his or her *soeur-ennemie* in the party shared a similar outlook. Writing shortly after Domenach and commenting like him on the Czech trials, Annie Besse affirmed that "our humanism" is on the side of the poor and oppressed, not of those whose crimes have brought them to their present condition; unlike Slánsky and company, "the workers are innocent . . . they are at the heart of the just struggle that contains the future of the world."¹²

An alternative form of affiliation was one that maintained a stronger

implicit sense of the importance of the intellectuals and spoke not in terms of allying with the proletariat but of keeping up their spirits in the face of adversity, of not "abandoning" them. In this language, the intellectual had the responsibility of protecting and nourishing the vulnerable working masses, rather than merely falling prostrate at their feet. The two approaches bespeak different sensibilities, even though they occasionally emanate from the same pen (an illustration of the ambivalent and confused thinking that marked much writing on this subject). In its best-known form, this second approach consisted of the famous warning, "Il ne faut pas désespérer Billancourt" (We must not let down Billancourt [the site of the giant Renault works near Paris]), but Sartre was not the first to express the view. In a letter to *Action* in January 1946, Mounier disassociated himself from any attempts to "go beyond Marxism," because any questioning of Marxism at this point would weaken the position and the resolve of the workers. On those occasions when he did tentatively question Communist acts (as in the trial and execution of Petkov, in Bulgaria), he took care to advise his readers that he only did so because the moral risks to which communism was exposed by its actions risked undermining the faith and prospects of the workers. All political positions were to be judged in the light of the needs of the workers (as determined by the intellectual making the judgment), and no abstract or morally "neutral" points of view were to be entertained. As Mounier summarized it in 1950, "We reject the abstraction that omits the point of view of Montreuil" (a workers' suburb of Paris). The geography of the metaphor is different, but the thrust of its message is the same.¹³

There is something distinctly condescending about this line of reasoning, an aspect of intellectual "slumming" that did not go unremarked even at the time. Intellectuals in these years demonstrated a remarkable capacity to be both humble and patronizing at the same time, combining a complex of inferiority with a sure sense of noblesse oblige. Simple explanations, or even simple untruths, were to be the fare of simple people, whose illusions could not stand the test of harsh verities and bad news. This was not a new idea—in the thirties Romain Rolland had kept his opinions on the Soviet Union to himself, "stifling" the need to speak out, and he was one of many.¹⁴ But in the thirties this

10. See Emmanuel Mounier, "Débat à haute voix," *Esprit*, February 1946, 175; and "Fidélité," *Esprit*, February 1950, 180, 182.

11. Jean-Marie Domenach, "La Tâche de protestation," *Esprit*, January 1953, 28.

12. Annie Besse is quoted in Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Au service du parti* (Paris, 1983), 78.

13. Mounier, letter to *Action*, 15 January 1946; "Petkov en nous," *Esprit*, October 1947, 599; "Fidélité," 178.

14. Thus Romain Rolland on his *real* view concerning Stalin and the USSR in 1937: "I stifle the need to say it and to write it," quoted by David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers* (rev. ed. New Haven, Conn., 1988), 130.

self-censorship had been part of a genuine desire to hold the line against the Fascist foe, to maintain the united front of the Left against a very real enemy on the Right. Morally misconceived, it made some political sense. In the forties and fifties, the enemy existed for the most part in the imagination of the intellectual, and the refusal to speak out was justified not in the name of anti-Fascist unity but on behalf of a childlike working population who would not understand. Paul Éluard, who could be obtuse enough when circumstances required it, was nevertheless perfectly lucid on the absurdities of Zdanov and his "Socialist Realism." But he refused to breathe a word of his doubts, or his disdain, in front of fellow Communists in his working-class district. "The poor things, it would discourage them," he explained to Claude Roy. "We mustn't upset those who are struggling. They wouldn't understand."¹⁵ On those rare occasions when this line of reasoning seemed insufficient, it was suggested that perhaps workers had different standards, that what would shock a mere intellectual would have a quite different meaning for a worker:

That which might seem intolerable to a bourgeois or an intellectual attached to an individualist form of civilization can be liberating to a worker used to union discipline and a collective existence.¹⁶

In this last image, the worker becomes something more than a child, an ideal, a well-muscled, simple-minded "other"; he is credited with wholly alien sensibilities. What the intellectual finds intolerable, the worker (in Paris or Prague, Lille or Lodz) not only finds inoffensive but may actually like and appreciate. One person's chains are another's liberation. The proletariat is patronized and protected not just because it might become dispirited and abandon the struggle but because in its world there has been a transvaluation of values. But how, then, is the intellectual to communicate with these aliens, with whose sensibilities and needs he or she seeks alignment? How is the gap between worker and thinker to be bridged? The answer for many was self-evident: by the intermediary of the Communist party, however rebarbative and unprepossessing it might appear and however uncooperative. It was not that Communists and workers were one and the same; as Sartre pointed out in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* the workers' cause is not axiomatically

15. See Claude Roy, *Nous* (Paris, 1972), 166.

16. Guy Clairbois in *La Quinzaine* 13 (15 May 1951), quoted by Yvan Tranvouez, "Guerre froide et progressisme chrétien," *Vingtième Siècle* 13 (January-March 1987): 89.

identical with that of the PCF, but only through the latter can we reach them. Later on, though, he would alter his views considerably, claiming that the Communist party *was* the working class—it embodied their true and essential interests:

In Stalinism, as in the old reformist socialism, the working class recognizes its own image, its work, the provisional repository of its sovereignty. You claim that this minority is harming the working class. But how could it? It draws its power from the proletariat, which could not turn its own activity against itself.¹⁷

Somewhere between the Sartre of 1947 and that of 1953 are to be found the sentiments of most of his progressive contemporaries. Some, like Jean Lacroix, were extreme Sartriens *avant l'heure*: "Communism does not claim to add anything essential to the profound will of the masses—it is but the proletariat made conscious."¹⁸ Others would have felt more comfortable with the opinion of Claude Jamet, writing in 1935: however disillusioning the reality of Communism, even if the Soviet revolution were to prove an "extinct volcano," "it would be necessary, in the limits of the possible, to continue pretending otherwise . . . yes, to lie, heroically."¹⁹ To reject the Communists and their claims would be to abandon all hope of communicating with the proletariat. What made this position difficult was not its apparent absurdity, its denial of any autonomy of judgment, but the willfully disagreeable actions of the Communists themselves. Had it not been for Stalinism, many felt, the path to a common sensibility and unity of spirit between workers and thinkers would have been much smoother. But however awful the PCF might become, loyalty was unconditional: "Do what you may, say what you will, *we* shall never Koestlerize . . . because one does not abandon the proletariat."²⁰

It required an extraordinary faith and a consistently high incidence of self-denial in order to maintain such a point of view. Certainly the Communists provided ample opportunity for a change of heart. Not only

17. See Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* in *Situations*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1948); "Réponse à Claude Lefort," *Les Temps modernes* 89 (April 1953): 617; "Les Communistes et la paix," *Situations*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1964).

18. Jean Lacroix, "Y a-t-il deux démocraties? De la démocratie libérale à la démocratie massive," *Esprit*, March 1946, 354–55.

19. Jamet quoted in Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle* (Paris, 1988), 618.

20. Mounier, "Journal à haute voix," *Esprit*, January 1950, 130. Contrast Arthur Koestler, writing in March 1948: "Fear of finding yourself in bad company is not an expression of political purity; it is an expression of lack of self-confidence." See Koestler, *The Trial of the Dinosaur* (New York, 1955), 50.

were these the years of Stalinism in its most reductive, Manichaean, and paranoid form but even those progressive intellectuals who wound themselves in to the most tortured and contradictory postures were rarely rewarded with even a nod of approval from the PCF itself. On the contrary, Sartre, Mounier, Bourdet, and their friends were more often the target of abuse and insult from the Communists, their contradictions and hypocrisies ruthlessly revealed and documented in the Communist press, for the edification of a readership who can only rarely have read them in the original.²¹ Communists had little use for independent intellectuals who felt obliged to discuss the crimes and errors of Stalin and his followers, even if these discussions nearly always ended in an offer of unconditional absolution. If the Communist party was indeed the vehicle alongside which the bourgeois intelligentsia were to ride into battle with the working masses, then it was a decidedly uncomfortable journey. But the more the driver sought to throw off these enthusiastic fellow-passengers, as the vehicle lurched and reeled along its dialectical path, the more they clung on and swore that they would never abandon the journey. For there could be no going back.

Like the Communists, intellectual fellow-travelers despised not only the rotten world of the bourgeoisie but also and especially their own role within it. Their vaulted, exaggerated sense of the importance of the intellectual within that world is precisely what generated their remarkable association of radicalism and abusive self-hatred. Nothing so became the Communist party, in the eyes of many intellectuals, as its justified mistrust of "the isolated intellectual," of people like them.²² The Communists might have some way to go in resolving their own dilemmas, but they had already helped resolve those of the intelligentsia; in his commentary on the 1948 Prague coup, Mounier concluded by warmly urging the Communists to "exorcise their own demons, as they have exorcised ours."²³ As a "collective intellectual," the Communist movement could do no wrong (which opinion constituted, in its ironic way, an exaltation of the claims of the intellectual but transposed onto a higher plane), even if its actions, and especially the opinions of its own in-house spokesmen, were often indefensible. Indeed, writers like Sartre had nothing but scorn for the party's *own* intellectuals; neither they nor

21. See, for example, the attacks on Bourdet, Mounier, and Cassou by Alfred Boscarlet, in *Cahiers du communisme* 2 (1950): 69–70.

22. "Le Parti Communiste se méfie justement de l'intellectuel isolé." Jean Lacroix, "Y a-t-il deux démocraties?" 354–55.

23. Mounier, "Prague," *Esprit*, March 1948, 364.

the Marxism they espoused was very intelligent, he wrote, and certainly not remotely as intelligent as the party itself. It was a source of regret to him that with their privileged access to the proletariat and its collective intelligence, they were unable to make a better job of humiliating and overcoming mere isolated thinkers like himself: "This marvelous tool that they possess—how one longs for it to give them a crushing superiority over those who just think at random."²⁴

This self-abnegation of the intellectual in the face of history and its horsemen was rooted in the view, articulated by a few and held by many, that the intellectual was by nature a "traitor." He or she was either a traitor to the causes believed in, always standing a little aside from them and therefore never wholly "authentic"; or else intellectuals were traitors to their class by virtue of this very engagement in such causes. The condition of the intellectual, that is to say, is treasonable by definition. This sentiment has resurfaced most recently in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues, for whom the beneficiaries of higher education in bourgeois society are by definition led to betray, even as they are themselves betrayed by the illusions of their condition.²⁵ As a characteristic trope of the French intelligentsia it thus has a fine pedigree, this curious expression of an oversophisticated conscience never at ease with itself unless engaged in unremitting self-condemnation.²⁶ Its omnipresence at this time, however, suggests the need for some explanation that goes beyond the accidental or the biographical. Certainly the latter accounts for much. Sartre's famous sense of his own worthlessness—of the unremitting absence of meaning and value in his origins, his career, his output—is only the extreme pole of a sentiment shared by many, as their memoirs reveal. Adherence (literal or merely emotional) to the Communist party or the proletariat conferred a sense of identity and community on those who, by their own account, lacked either. Men like Roy, Morgan, Domenach, and others had swung from Right to Left since the late thirties, and the long crisis of schizophrenia that some of them claim to have experienced during the period 1948–56, especially if they had joined the party and remained in it, was probably less painful than the

24. Sartre, "Le Réformisme et les fétiches," *Les Temps modernes* 122 (February 1956): 1158.

25. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les Héritiers* (Paris, 1964); Bourdieu, *La Noblesse d'état* (Paris, 1989).

26. "La mauvaise conscience de nombreux maîtres de la pensée occidentale le empêche de reconnaître le crime dès qu'il ne s'agit plus de condamner vaillamment 'un monde pourri.'" Mircea Eliade, "Examen leprosum," *Preuves* 14 (April 1952): 26.

sense of isolation and exclusion that preceded this commitment and was to follow it.

If intellectuals signed away their critical faculties to give some meaning to their "little private histories,"²⁷ they nonetheless retained in nearly every case a degree of real autonomy in their own professional sphere. Very few artists, playwrights, scientists, historians, or philosophers of this era who paid lip service to the Communist project and scorned its critics ever let it invade the sanctuary of their work. In the case of those who were still young, like the sociologist Edgar Morin or the historians Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Maurice Agulhon, or François Furet, it might be argued that they were saved by their youth. But older scholars like Georges Lefebvre also managed to maintain academic integrity even as they put their conclusions at the service of the revolution. Picasso and Fernand Léger, Joliot-Curie and Jean-Pierre Vernant remained faithful to their artistic and scientific callings while striving resolutely to defend the most absurd official positions of their Communist colleagues and allies. This points to a curious neutral region in intellectual sympathy for Stalinism and may offer a further clue to the nature of that sympathy.

In order to develop this argument it is necessary to establish certain distinctions. Leading, successful, influential figures in the intellectual community were rarely to be found in the Communist party. Aragon is an exception, and the prominent use made of him by the party is symptomatic of his unusual standing. Most older party intellectuals were either second-rate performers in their field or else intellectuals only in the broadest, generic sense—schoolteachers, journalists, provincial professors, librarians, and the like. Thus when the party demanded conformity in the intellectual sphere—whether in the interpretation of events, adherence to aesthetic "principles," or the selection of fictional subject matter, it was not placing too great a burden on most of its own intellectual membership. Conversely, it was in no position to enforce such standards on outsiders and conspicuously failed to do so. Second, most intellectuals who joined the PCF, including those who would later make prominent careers in their field, were very young at the time. The typical Communist intellectual in 1950 was a man or woman in his or her twenties. Vulnerable to party pressure, these people were nonetheless not yet established figures, and they were on the periphery of the Communist movement. If their work did not always conform to the mandated

norms, it did not matter very much. The older generation of established writers, scholars, and artists did not join the party, on the whole. Like Mounier, Camus, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and their colleagues, they initially maintained a friendly distance, supporting communism for their own reasons. Their work as novelists, playwrights, philosophers, or historians had begun well before the Liberation, and their aesthetic, as distinct from their political, identity was in no way dependent on or related to the workers' movement. Even when, as with Sartre, this was a source of regret, they did not and could not change it. At most they ceased producing artistic or scholarly work and confined themselves to political activism. More commonly, they did both, in a tense and contradictory juxtaposition.

In this book I am concerned chiefly with these well-established people and much less with their younger colleagues. The latter, together with the lesser intelligentsia of the party rank and file, form the subject of Jeannine Verdès-Leroux's important work, and their history is a different one.²⁸ The Communist party itself had an interest in exaggerating the support it received from intellectuals, for a number of reasons: like Czechoslovakia, Poland, or Russia itself, France is a country in which the political and cultural role of the intelligentsia is a prominent and recognized fact of public life. As the putative heir to the best traditions of the nation, the PCF laid claim to this inheritance as to others. Furthermore, the prominence of the Parisian intellectual community in postwar France was indisputable, and the Communists had every reason to seek to extend their influence into such circles. But the party's interest in, and pressure on, intellectuals varied somewhat according to their activity. Those whose work related directly to the subject matter of Communist discourse (historians, sociologists, economists) were of curiously little concern, despite the fact that historians especially thronged to the party in considerable numbers. Novelists, painters, and sculptors, on the other hand, were of much greater value to the party, as pure intellectuals whose symbolic presence at public meetings and in front organizations was especially highly valued.

None of this was wholly new. In the thirties it had been common for people like Gide, Rolland, or Malraux to act in a similar capacity as cultural guarantors for the Communist line, and the Spanish civil war had shown that intellectuals could be both engaged and retain their creative

27. Claude Roy, *Moi, Je* (Paris, 1969), 464.

28. See Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Au service du parti* (Paris, 1983); and *Le Réveil des somnambules* (Paris, 1987).

autonomy—no one accused Picasso, Malraux, or Bernanos of having abandoned his artistic soul. What brought about a significant change was the pronounced emphasis after 1948 on artistic conformity, on “socialist realism” and the “two cultures.” “Proletarian” art was not a new idea—the Russian debates of the twenties were quite well known and the Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires had pressed hard for “committed” art in its propaganda of the early thirties. But Communists and non-Communists alike had felt free to ignore such pressures, which had been muted in the Popular Front years, especially during the Resistance and the Liberation. Following the establishment of the Cominform, however, and the “two camps” theory, which Zdanov and Stalin invoked to justify the increased rigidity of Communist practice after 1947, artistic (and scientific) conformity became a serious issue. We have already seen the ambivalence and inadequacy of progressive intellectuals’ responses to symptoms of Zdanovism in the Lysenko affair and even in the show trials, which are in some sense best thought of as the bloody practice of which socialist realism is the theory. When Laurent Casanova formally imported Zdanov’s aesthetics into the French milieu, he aroused the same wary, mealy-mouthed response:

One cannot deny in all this a real effort at coherence and also humility, a submission to the concrete realities contained in the proletariat’s historic struggle, which gives to the intellectual elements of an authentic greatness.²⁹

This is not some Communist functionary but Jean-Marie Domenach, writing in *Esprit*. He goes on to say that the utter submission of literature, art, and science does place the *Communist* intellectual in a “contradictory situation”; what he does not appreciate is just how contradictory was his *own* situation, as an intellectual content to praise the forced submission of his fellow intellectuals to “concrete realities.” In France, Casanova had no weapon of enforcement beyond expulsion from the party, but in the East, “concrete reality” meant something altogether more specific, as Domenach well knew. The response of André Breton was much more to the point. Under present circumstances, he wrote, with direct reference to his former friend Aragon, “the shameful word ‘engagement,’ which has become popular since the war, stinks of a servility which art and poetry abhor.”³⁰

29. Domenach, “Le Parti Communiste français et les intellectuels,” *Esprit*, May 1949, 736.

30. André Breton, March 1948, quoted by Jean Galtier-Boissière, *Mon journal dans la Grande Pagaille* (Paris, 1950), 212.

In practice, Communist and non-Communist intellectuals alike devoted little real attention to the aesthetic or epistemological implications of the “two camps” theory. Those who took Lysenko half seriously were never professional scientists, much less biologists. André Stil provoked nothing but silence in the community of painters. Picasso was so unconcerned as to provide a decidedly inappropriate portrait of Stalin for a Communist journal, and his “caricature” was officially rejected and reproved. *Les Temps modernes*, characteristically, responded to things it found embarrassing by ignoring them. From 1948 until 1956 there is astonishingly little space in its pages devoted to events in the Peoples’ Democracies, and even less to the cultural policies of communism. Simone de Beauvoir, in her memoirs, does reprove her earlier self for excess of “idealism” in her essays of the forties and regrets her failure to be more down-to-earth and “realist” in her language.³¹ But she is indulging this mild and rare self-criticism in the name of *ouvriérisme*, not socialist realism, an important distinction. On the whole, the cultural dimension of Stalinism was something with which French intellectuals were least at ease, just because it came closest to things they knew and cared about: “We were more intolerant of idiocy in areas we knew well than of crimes in those of which we knew little.”³²

In contrast with contemporary Italian intellectuals of the Left, the French did not openly insist that the axis of progress/reaction in culture is not the same as in politics; they merely kept their thoughts to themselves.³³ This moral dishonesty may not reflect well upon them in retrospect—and it should hardly be accounted a matter of pride to have dissented from totalitarianism over bad art but not over mass murder—but it did allow practicing artists, novelists, and the like to maintain their professional integrity while adhering to the progressive line in public affairs. This seemed all the more important in that many in the postwar generation were drawn together and to the side of the Communists by a further consideration, a theme of surpassing urgency, a grid through which all contemporary politics were viewed and which lent a distorted image to everything it touched—the issue of “peace.”

From one point of view it is odd to find the theme of “peace” at the heart of contemporary debate. This is because the memory of 1938 was

31. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses* (Paris, 1963), 80–81.

32. Claude Roy, *Nous*, 445.

33. For Italian debates on similar themes, see Elio Vittorini, “Rivoluzione e attività morale,” *Il Politecnico* 38 (November 1947); and Vittorini, *Gli anni del “Politecnico”: Lettere, 1945–1951* (Turin, 1977).

still fresh, and the emphasis on peace at any price—Chamberlain's famous "peace for our time," Blum's "cowardly relief"—was not forgotten. *Appeasement* was a dirty word and *Munichois* a profound insult. But all the same, intellectuals of the postwar decade had abiding memories of the pacifist mood of the thirties and their own earlier opposition to war and bloodshed. Many of them were old enough to remember the First World War or even to have fought in it, and the conflict with Hitler had not completely obliterated the earlier one and the impact it had left. The war of 1940 had been fought under ambiguous circumstances: not only had it been declared on behalf of a Poland that was then left to bleed dry, but it was fought in the name of a residual antifascism even as Daladier strove to retain some semblance of a friendship with Mussolini. Until the Germans crossed the Meuse, the French had no territorial ambitions in the conflict, and from the outset the far Left and the radical Right were opposed to pursuing the fight. Assuredly, Vichy, the Occupation, and the emergence of a Resistance had altered the terms of engagement, but the uncertainties of World War II and its meaning had by no means obliterated the much more deeply implanted lessons of the Great War and its aftermath.

Thus the conflict with Hitler that had so perturbed interwar pacifist sentiment did not ultimately douse it. On the contrary, it confirmed it. The pacifists of the earlier decade had been repelled not only by the prospect of another round of Sommes and Verduns but also by the apparent irrationality of fighting to uphold a settlement, that of Versailles, in which few believed. Hitler, Mussolini, and their French friends had played very effectively on the theme of international injustice, the suggestion that the Great War had not only been an unnecessary and futile massacre of the innocents but that it had ended in a massive social and diplomatic injustice. Neither the Soviet Union nor Germany was pleased with the outcome, and even among those who would oppose them there was an unease, an awareness that the international dispositions of the interwar years rested on indefensible foundations. But when the next war finally came, as everyone anticipated it would, these doubts were temporarily laid to rest, at least among those who took up the struggle against nazism. The antifascism of the resisters was the one sure and unimpeachable motive that all could share. With the defeat of Hitler it would again be possible to look to peace but this time on morally defensible premises.

In one sense, then, the de facto peace settlement of 1945 was regarded as altogether more satisfactory than that of 1918. The ambiguity of the

German situation was cleared up, since the loser was no longer a struggling democratic republic but a defeated totalitarian dictatorship. The Russians had emerged as victorious and had seen their lost territories and imperial frontiers restored, and the war had been fought and won not for the interests of nations (or capitalists) but in the name of peoples and ideals. The case for preserving the peace of 1945 seemed altogether stronger than that for its predecessor, the more so in that the postwar revolutions of the forties had apparently succeeded in the very countries where they had been defeated by local reaction and foreign arms in the years 1918–23. The only muted complaints came from Poles and their fellows in the Soviet zone of Europe; but the idea of opposing the Soviet hegemony in that region was anathema to a broad swathe of opinion in the West. After six years of war, no one in France, in the years after 1945 any more than in 1939, wanted to "die for Danzig" (or Gdańsk).

An important constituent of this postwar obsession with peace was, paradoxically, that same antifascism that had finally drawn prewar pacifists into war. Now that Nazism and its friends were defeated and the Soviet Union and its allies victorious, the only possible beneficiary of a weakening of that alliance, of divisions among the wartime victors, or a conflict between them, would be fascism itself. This may sound curious to the modern ear, but it made some sense at the time. The years 1938–44 had been a profound shock, an awakening to political realities of which many had previously had little idea. For the best of them the experience had taught them something of the shocking specificity of fascism; more violent, more extreme, more total in its hatred and its convictions than anything they had previously encountered, it was the true and ultimate force of evil. To the struggle against fascism, now and for the future, all else must be subsumed. For others whose awakening to the evils of fascism had been slow and who were all too well aware of this as they contemplated their own record, there was a lot of ground to be made up. Above all else, one must not again be found wanting, left behind in the struggle.

"Fighting the last war," then? Perhaps, although we should recall that in 1945 and for a few years to come, the threat of a revival of fascism seemed plausible, if only by analogy with the aftermath of World War I. If the Americans once again left Europe (as most expected and many wished), and with Britain weakened perhaps beyond repair, a revival of the German threat was a plausible hypothesis. In any case, anti-Fascist feeling and the fear of being once again caught unawares were widespread and real. For this reason postwar intellectuals continued to maintain, as

Klaus Mann had done at the Paris Congress of anti-Fascist intellectuals in 1935, that their position was defined by whatever fascism was not. This was worthy as far as it went, but it left them with a negative, reactive attitude towards politics, with their affiliation and engagement defined by the behavior, real or imagined, of others. If a renascent fascism was the danger, then it did indeed make sense to line up with the only continental force capable of blocking it, the Communist movement and the Red Army.

These feelings were exacerbated and given point by the collapse of the postwar alliance and the onset of the Cold War. Beginning in the summer of 1947, it really did seem for a while as though the West and the Soviet Union might come to blows over the German question, the plans for U.S. economic aid, and the Soviet Union's increasingly rigid grip over its zone of influence in East-Central Europe.³⁴ The expectation of war was widespread (especially in France) and was directly responsible for the increasing sympathy for the Soviet Union in the writings of contemporary intellectuals. Claude Bourdet was all the more inclined to accept the prosecution and execution of Nikola Petkov in that he was convinced by the Communists' claim that Petkov had sought a "Western intervention" in Bulgaria's affairs, an intervention that would have sparked regional, perhaps continent-wide conflict. Within France, intellectuals detected a "war psychosis" and identified the anti-Communist rhetoric of the authorities as its primary source; in the end it was very simple—"Anticommunism is a force for death . . . a force for war."³⁵

In such circumstances, the struggle for peace came to subsume and replace all other issues. Because fascism would be the beneficiary of war and because it was the United States that was accused of provoking the conflicts and divisions that seemed to be on the brink of open warfare, the drive for peace and the defense of communism merged into a single theme. From 1946 until the death of Stalin, no other topic so dominated public discussion, directly or subliminally. The defense of democracy and the preservation of peace merged into a single goal, the prime duty of the writer in the view of one prominent figure.³⁶ The progressive Christian intelligentsia was especially obsessed with this theme, allowing

34. See, for example, François Mauriac, *Journal*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1953), 20–21 July 1947.

35. Claude Bourdet, in *Combat*, 21 September 1947; Mounier, "Débat à haute voix," *Esprit*, February 1946, 145.

36. On the artists' duty to "defend peace," see Jean-Richard Bloch, "Responsabilité du talent," *Europe*, August 1946, 88.

itself to be blinded by it into the most incredulous and indefensible positions, much as its successors in the 1970s and 1980s would make of peace and disarmament a demand transcending any concern for justice or rights in eastern Europe.³⁷ Zdanov might be stupid, and Stalin cruel. But armaments were the ultimate stupidity, war the final cruelty. By 1950, the progressive intelligentsia was beginning to sound remarkably like the pacifist writers of the thirties, unconsciously echoing the latter in its apologies for totalitarianism and dictators. Even Camus, who could by no stretch of the imagination be described by 1953 as sympathetic to Communist practices, nonetheless prefaced a collection of his writings published in that year with the claim that the preservation of peace, the rejection of warlike attitudes from whichever side they came, was the main task of those who took part in public life.³⁸

The Communists played on these sensibilities to remarkable effect, proving even more adept at such exploitation than the Fascist journalists of the late thirties. The credibility of the Communists in this matter derived not merely from their anti-Fascist credentials but also from the fact that Stalin was indeed content with the postwar dispensations. Although it is arguable that after the change of direction in 1947 the Soviet Union was more actively interested in disrupting the West, until then the division of Europe had been to the Communists' advantage. Thus, from 1945 until 1948, Stalin had acquired considerable credit among Western sympathizers as a "man of peace"; the division consecrated at Yalta, the subordination of the coalition governments of the East European states, the trials of their erstwhile leaders were all viewed through the twin spectrum of "Soviet security" and "popular revolution." To this should be added the widespread sympathy for the Soviet Union arising from the Americans' monopoly (until 1949) of the atomic weapon. Sartre spoke for many in his generation when he wrote in *Le Fantôme de Staline* that Stalin had only established "satellite" states as a response to the Marshall Plan, "*cette manoeuvre de guerre*." Until then the Soviet Union had sought merely to guarantee and preserve its own external security. By its defensive moves in 1948 and afterwards it had preserved the peace and saved Europe for socialism.

This was written at the end of 1956. By then the Soviet Union had also benefited from its vigorous opposition to the rearmament of Germany and Stalin's emphasis from 1951 on "peaceful coexistence." But

37. See Václav Havel, "Politika a svědomí," *Svědectví* 18, no. 72 (1984).

38. Albert Camus, "Avant-propos," *Actuelles*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1953).

even in the period 1948–51, when communism was at its most aggressive and sectarian, it had retained the identification with “peace” in the eyes of its admirers. Indeed, it was precisely in these years that this identification was most forcefully asserted. In Wroclaw in August 1948, the Movement for Peace held its founding congress, at the same time as a parallel Congress of Partisans of Peace was held simultaneously in Prague and Paris. This meeting was followed in April 1949 by a national conference of the newly formed *Mouvement des intellectuels français pour la défense de la paix*, held in Paris and attended by, among others, Louis Aragon, Jean Cassou, Pierre Debray (for *Témoignage Chrétien*), Paul Éluard, the Joliot-Curies, Picasso, Fernand Léger, Paul Rivet, Seghers, Vercors, Jean Wahl, Jean-Louis Barrault, and Madeleine Renaud—a veritable *Almanach de Gotha* of the progressive artistic elite of postwar France. Seghers took the opportunity to press the claims, the “intellectual presence,” of France through books and other writings—“through its books, France must show its desire for peace.”³⁹

The World Peace Congress met for a second time in November 1950 and again in Vienna in December 1952, a few days after the end of the Slánsky trial. For most of this period its activities were dominated by the so-called Stockholm Appeal, issued in March 1950 by the permanent committee of the World Congress of Partisans of Peace. Like the Cominform in these years, from which they took their cue, the appeal and the various congresses were devoted to gathering support from the widest possible international constituency in opposition to war and to any modification of the postwar settlement. All the various peace movements and their meetings were ostensibly directed by committees composed of influential and well-known figures from the artistic and scientific communities but were in practice controlled, much like their forebears of the thirties, by hard-working Communist functionaries, many of them based in Prague. They succeeded in gathering many millions of signatures (though much of the bulk was made up of “voluntary” adhesions from the Communist bloc or from members of various Communist parties around the globe), and there is no doubt that the peace initiatives of the Communists added considerably to their appeal and their legitimacy in the eyes of non-Communist intellectuals.

The French intelligentsia played a disproportionate role in these

39. See *Mouvement des intellectuels français pour la défense de la paix*, proceedings of the Conférence nationale, Paris, 23 April 1949, 19.

organizations. Frédéric Joliot-Curie and Jean Lafitte were the nominal heads of various international movements, while Pierre Cot was a prominent figurehead at the International Association of Democratic Jurists, a comparable institution whose prime function was to deflect attention away from Soviet crimes by focussing international concern on injustice and inhumanity in the non-Communist world. More than elsewhere, prominent local figures were active in the French branches of these movements; when they left them, it was not normally through any disillusion with the “peace movement” as such but usually because the Communists had found fault with their behavior, as when Cassou and Domenach were condemned by their local peace movement branch in 1950 for Cassou’s criticism of the Rajk trial and Domenach’s support of him. As the guests of peace organizations, French journalists and artists visited East European countries and wrote enthusiastically about their experiences, seemingly unaware that they were regarded, by their hosts and their hosts’ victims alike, as “pigeons,” the happy successors to the “useful idiots” of the thirties.⁴⁰ Their naiveté apparently knew few limits; writing in praise of Yugoslavia in 1950, Domenach criticized the Soviet Union for arrogating to itself the right to define who was and who was not a “peace-loving” regime—our Communist friends in the peace movement claim no such monopoly, he insisted.⁴¹

Their vision blurred and tinted rose by the maneuvers and alignments of the Communists and their own longings and doubts, French intellectuals were thus exposed and vulnerable after World War II in a way they were not before or since. Of someone who could seriously believe in 1950 that there was a distinction to be drawn between the policies of Stalin and the attitudes of “our Communist friends in the peace movement,” it can well be said that he would believe anything. But Jean-Marie Domenach was not alone—Simone de Beauvoir had drawn similar distinctions, and analogous hair-splitting arguments were the staple fare of progressive intellectuals. In the context of this period, one can see how otherwise intelligent and sophisticated people came to such positions; indeed, given the various factors already noted, it may even appear as though the postwar condition of the French intelligentsia was

40. Jo Langer, *Une Saison à Bratislava* (Paris, 1979), 246. Langer notes that most of the “pigeons” were French, Italian, or Indian. See also Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims* (Oxford, 1981); and Fred Kupferman, *Au pays des Soviets* (Paris, 1979).

41. Domenach, “Une Révolution rencontre le mensonge,” *Esprit*, February 1950, 195.

the natural product of a history and circumstances that gave them no alternative exit. This is certainly not so; moral conditions, unlike economic ones, are always elective. Nevertheless, it did seem to many as though there was indeed no other political or moral option for the *bien-pensant* intellectual of these years. In order to understand the circumstances in which such could appear to be the case, we must now turn our attention to an empty space at the center of French political thought.

PART FOUR

The Middle Kingdom
