

This essay is based on an interview with Miss Arendt by the German writer Adelbert Reif, which took place in the summer of 1970. It has been translated by Denver Lindley.

QUESTION: In your study *On Violence* at several points you take up the question of the revolutionary student movement in the Western countries. In the end, though, one thing remains unclear: Do you consider the student protest movement in general a historically positive process?

ARENDT: I don't know what you mean by "positive." I assume you mean, am I for it or against it. Well, I welcome some of the goals of the movement, especially in America, where I am better acquainted with them than elsewhere; toward others I take a neutral attitude, and some I consider dangerous nonsense—as, for example, politicizing and "refunctioning" (what the Germans call *umfunktionieren*) the universities, that is, perverting their function, and other things of that sort. But not the right of participation. Within certain limits I thoroughly approve of that. But I don't want to go into that question for the moment.

If I disregard all the national differences, which of course are very great, and only take into account that this is a global movement—something that has never existed before in this form—and if I consider what (apart from

goals, opinions, doctrines) really distinguishes this generation in all countries from earlier generations, then the first thing that strikes me is its determination to act, its joy in action, the assurance of being able to change things by one's own efforts. This, of course, is expressed very differently in different countries according to their various political situations and historical traditions, which in turn means according to their very different political talents. But I would like to take that up later.

Let us look briefly at the beginnings of this movement. It arose in the United States quite unexpectedly in the fifties, at the time of the so-called "silent generation," the apathetic, undemonstrative generation. The immediate cause was the civil-rights movement in the South, and the first to join it were students from Harvard, who then attracted students from other famous eastern universities. They went to the South, organized brilliantly, and for a time had a quite extraordinary success, so long, that is, as it was simply a question of changing the climate of opinion—which they definitely succeeded in doing in a short time—and doing away with certain laws and ordinances in the Southern states; in short, so long as it was a question of purely legal and political matters. Then they collided with the enormous social needs of the city ghettos in the North—and there they came to grief, there they could accomplish nothing.

It was only later, after they had actually accomplished what could be accomplished through purely political action, that the business with the universities began. It started in Berkeley with the Free Speech Movement and continued with the Anti-War Movement, and again the results have been quite extraordinary. From these beginnings and especially from these successes springs everything that has since spread around the world.

In America this new assurance that one can change things one doesn't like is conspicuous especially in small matters. A typical instance was a comparatively harmless confrontation some years ago. When students learned that the service employees of their university were not receiving standard wages, they struck—with success. Basically it was an act of solidarity with "their" university against the policy of the administration. Or, to take another instance, in 1970 university students demanded time off in order to be able to take part in the election campaign, and a number of the larger universities granted them this free time. This is a political activity *outside the university* which is made possible by the university in recognition of the fact that students are citizens as well. I consider both instances definitely positive. There are, however, other things I consider far less positive, and we will get to them later.

The basic question is: What really did happen? As I see it, for the first time in a very long while a spontaneous political movement arose which not only did not simply carry on propaganda, but acted, *and, moreover, acted almost exclusively from moral motives*. Together with this moral factor, quite rare in what is usually considered a mere power or interest play, another experience new for our time entered the game of politics: It turned out that acting is fun. This generation discovered what the eighteenth century had called "public happiness," which means that when man takes part in public life he opens up for himself a dimension of human experience that otherwise remains closed to him and that in some way constitutes a part of complete "happiness."

In all these matters I would rate the student movement as very positive. Its further development is another question. How long the so-called "positive" factors will hold good, whether they are not already in process of being dis-

solved, eaten away by fanaticism, ideologies, and a destructiveness that often borders on the criminal, on one side, by boredom, on the other, no one knows. The good things in history are usually of very short duration, but afterward have a decisive influence on what happens over long periods of time. Just consider how short the true classical period in Greece was, and that we are in effect still nourished by it today.

Q: Ernst Bloch recently pointed out in a lecture that the student protest movement is not confined to its known objectives but contains principles derived from the old natural law: "Men who do not truckle, who do not flatter the whims of their masters." Now Bloch says that the students have brought back into consciousness "this other subversive element of revolution," which must be distinguished from simple protest at a bad economic situation, and in so doing have made an important contribution "to the history of revolutions and very likely to the structure of the coming revolutions." What is your opinion?

A: What Ernst Bloch calls "natural law" is what I was referring to when I spoke of the conspicuous moral coloration of the movement. However, I would add—and on this point I am not in agreement with Bloch—that something similar was the case with all revolutionaries. If you look at the history of revolutions, you will see that it was never the oppressed and degraded themselves who led the way, but those who were not oppressed and not degraded but could not bear it that others were. Only, they were embarrassed to admit their moral motives—and this shame is very old. I don't want to go into the history of it here, though it has a very interesting aspect. But the moral factor has always been present, although it finds clearer expres-

sion today because people are not ashamed to own up to it.

As for the business of "not truckling," naturally it plays an especially important role in those countries, like Japan and Germany, where obsequiousness had grown to such formidable proportions, while in America, where I cannot recollect a single student ever having truckled, it is really rather meaningless. I have already mentioned that this international movement naturally takes on different national colorations, and that these colorations, simply because they are colorings, are sometimes the most striking thing; it is easy, especially for an outsider, to mistake what is most conspicuous for what is most important.

On the question of "the coming revolution" in which Ernst Bloch believes and about which I do not know whether it will come at all or what structure it might have if it did, I would like to say this: There are, it is true, a whole series of phenomena of which one can say at once that in the light of our experience (which after all is not very old, but dates only from the French and American Revolutions; before that there were rebellions and *coups d'état* but no revolutions) they belong to the prerequisites of revolution—such as the threatened breakdown of the machinery of government, its being undermined, the loss of confidence in the government on the part of the people, the failure of public services, and various others.

The loss of power and authority by all the great powers is clearly visible, even though it is accompanied by an immense accumulation of the means of violence in the hands of the governments, but the increase in weapons cannot compensate for the loss of power. Nevertheless, this situation need not lead to revolution. For one thing, it can end in counterrevolution, the establishment of dictatorships, and, for another, it can end in total anticlimax: it need not lead to anything. No one alive today knows anything about

a coming revolution: "the principle of hope" (Ernst Bloch) certainly gives no sort of guarantee.

At the moment, one prerequisite for a coming revolution is lacking: a group of real revolutionaries. Just what the students on the left would most like to be—revolutionaries—that is just what they are not. Nor are they organized as revolutionaries: they have no inkling of what power means, and if power were lying in the street and they knew it was lying there, they are certainly the last to be ready to stoop down and pick it up. That is precisely what revolutionaries do. Revolutionaries do not make revolutions! The revolutionaries are those who know when power is lying in the street and when they can pick it up. Armed uprising by itself has never yet led to a revolution.

Nevertheless, what could pave the way for a revolution, in the sense of preparing the revolutionaries, is a real analysis of the existing situation such as used to be made in earlier times. To be sure, even then these analyses were mostly very inadequate, but the fact remains that they were made. In this respect I see absolutely no one, near or far, in a position to do this. The theoretical sterility and analytical dullness of this movement are just as striking and depressing as its joy in action is welcome. In Germany the movement is also rather helpless in practical matters; it can cause some rioting, but aside from the shouting of slogans it can organize nothing. In America, where on certain occasions it has brought out hundreds of thousands to demonstrate in Washington, the movement is in this respect, in its ability to act, most impressive! But the mental sterility is the same in both countries—only, in Germany, where people are so fond of loose, theoretical talk, they go about peddling obsolete conceptions and categories mainly derived from the nineteenth century, or beat you about the head with them, as the case may be. None of this bears

any relationship to modern conditions. And none of this has anything to do with reflection.

Things are different, to be sure, in South America and in Eastern Europe, principally because there has been vastly more concrete practical experience there. But to examine this in detail would take us too far afield.

I would like to talk about one other point that occurred to me in connection with Ernst Bloch and "the principle of hope." The most suspicious thing about this movement in Western Europe and America is a curious despair involved in it, as though its adherents already knew they would be smashed. And as though they said to themselves: At least we want to have provoked our defeat; we do not want, in addition to everything else, to be as innocent as lambs. There is an element of running amok on the part of these bomb-throwing children. I have read that French students in Nanterre during the last disturbances—not the ones in 1968, but the recent ones—wrote on the walls: "*Ne gâchez pas votre pourriture*" ("Don't spoil your rottenness"). Right on, right on. This conviction that everything deserves to be destroyed, that everybody deserves to go to hell—this sort of desperation can be detected everywhere, though it is less pronounced in America, where "the principle of hope" is yet unknown, perhaps because people don't yet need it so desperately.

Q: Do you see the student protest movement in the United States as essentially frustrated?

A: By no means. The successes it has so far achieved are too great. Its success with the Negro question is spectacular, and its success in the matter of the war is perhaps even greater. It was primarily the students who succeeded in dividing the country, and ended with a majority, or at

all events a very strong, highly qualified minority, against the war. It could, however, very quickly come to ruin if it actually succeeded in destroying the universities—something I consider possible. In America, perhaps this danger is less than elsewhere because American students are still more oriented toward political questions and less toward internal university problems, with the result that a part of the populace feels solidarity with them on essential matters. But in America, too, it is still conceivable that the universities will be destroyed, for the whole disturbance coincides with a crisis in the sciences, in belief in science, and in belief in progress, that is, with an internal, not simply a political, crisis of the universities.

If the students should succeed in destroying the universities, then they will have destroyed their own base of operations—and this would be true in all the countries affected, in America as well as in Europe. Nor will they be able to find another base, simply because they cannot come together anywhere else. It follows that the destruction of the universities would spell the end of the whole movement.

But it would not be the end either of the educational system or of research. Both can be organized quite differently; other forms and institutions for professional training and research are perfectly conceivable. But then there will be no more college students. Let us ask what in fact is student freedom. The universities make it possible for young people over a number of years *to stand outside all social groups and obligations*, to be truly free. If the students destroy the universities, then nothing of the sort will any longer exist; consequently there will be no rebellion against society either. In some countries and at some times, they have been well on their way to sawing off the branch they are sitting on. That in turn is connected with running

amok. In this way the student protest movement could in fact not only fail to gain its demands but could also be destroyed.

Q: Would that hold good, too, for the student protest movement in Europe?

A: Yes, it would apply to most student movements. Once more, not so much to those in South America and in the Eastern European countries, where the protest movement is not directly dependent on the universities and where a large part of the population is behind it.

Q: In your study *On Violence*, there is this sentence: "The third world is not a reality but an ideology." That sounds like blasphemy. For, of course, the third world is a reality; what's more, a reality that was brought into being first by the Western colonial powers and later with the cooperation of the United States. And so it is not at all surprising that this reality produced by capitalism should result, under the influence of the world-wide and general indignation of youth, in a new ideology. However, the significant thing, I believe, is not this ideology of the New Left, but simply the existence of the third world, the reality of the third world, which first made this ideology possible.

Do you really intend by your astonishing sentence to question the reality of the third world as such? Possibly there's a misunderstanding here that you could clear up.

A: Not a bit of it. I am truly of the opinion that the third world is exactly what I said, an ideology or an illusion.

Africa, Asia, South America—those are realities. If you now compare these regions with Europe and America,

then you can say of them—but only from this perspective—that they are underdeveloped, and you assert thereby that this is a crucial common denominator between these countries. However, you overlook the innumerable things they do *not* have in common, and the fact that what they do have in common is only a contrast that exists with another world; which means that the idea of underdevelopment as the important factor is a European-American prejudice. The whole thing is simply a question of perspective; there is a logical fallacy here. Try telling a Chinese sometime that he belongs to exactly the same world as an African Bantu tribesman and, believe me, you'll get the surprise of your life. The only ones who have an obviously political interest in saying that there is a third world are, of course, those who stand on the lowest step—that is, the Negroes in Africa. In their case it's easy to understand; all the rest is empty talk.

The New Left has borrowed the catchword of the third world from the arsenal of the Old Left. It has been taken in by the distinction made by the imperialists between colonial countries and colonizing powers. For the imperialists, Egypt was, naturally, like India: they both fell under the heading of "subject races." This imperialist leveling out of all differences is copied by the New Left, only with labels reversed. It is always the same old story: being taken in by every catchword, the inability to think or else the unwillingness to see phenomena as they really are, without applying categories to them in the belief that they can thereby be classified. It is just this that constitutes theoretical helplessness.

The new slogan—Natives of all colonies, or of all former colonies or of all underdeveloped countries, unite!—is even crazier than the old one from which it was copied: Work-

ers of the world, unite!—which, after all, has been thoroughly discredited. I am certainly not of the opinion that one can learn very much from history—for history constantly confronts us with what is new—but there are a couple of small things that it should be possible to learn. What fills me with such misgivings is that I do not see anywhere people of this generation recognizing realities as such, and taking the trouble to think about them.

Q: Marxist philosophers and historians, and not just those in the strict sense of the word, today take the view that in this stage of the historical development of mankind there are only two possible alternatives for the future: capitalism or socialism. In your view, does another alternative exist?

A: I see no such alternatives in history; nor do I know what is in store there. Let's not talk about such grand matters as "the historical development of mankind"—in all likelihood it will take a turn that corresponds neither to the one nor to the other, and let us hope it will come as a surprise to us.

But let's look at your alternatives historically for a moment: it began, after all, with capitalism, an economic system that no one had planned and no one had foreseen. This system, as is generally known, owed its start to a monstrous process of expropriation such as has never occurred before in history in this form—that is, without military conquest. Expropriation, the initial accumulation of capital—that was the law according to which capitalism arose and according to which it has advanced step by step. Now just what people imagine by socialism I do not know. But if you look at what has actually happened in Russia, then you can see that there the process of expropriation

has been carried further; and you can observe that something very similar is going on in the modern capitalistic countries, where it is as though the old expropriation process is again let loose. Overtaxation, a *de facto* devaluation of currency, inflation coupled with a recession—what else are these but relatively mild forms of expropriation?

Only in the Western countries are there political and legal obstacles that constantly keep this process of expropriation from reaching the point where life would be completely unbearable. In Russia there is, of course, not socialism, but state socialism, which is the same thing as state capitalism would be—that is, total expropriation. Total expropriation occurs when all political and legal safeguards of private ownership have disappeared. In Russia, for instance, certain groups enjoy a very high standard of living. The trouble is only that whatever these people may have at their disposition—cars, country houses, expensive furniture, chauffeur-driven limousines, et cetera—they do not own; it can be taken away from them by the government any day. No man there is so rich that he cannot be made a beggar overnight—without even the right to employment—in case of any conflict with the ruling powers. (One glance into recent Soviet literature, where people have started to tell the truth, will testify to the atrocious consequences more tellingly than all economic and political theories.)

All our experiences—as distinguished from theories and ideologies—tell us that the process of expropriation, which started with the rise of capitalism, does not stop with the expropriation of the means of production; only legal and political institutions that are independent of the economic forces and their automatism can control and check the inherently monstrous potentialities of this process. Such political controls seem to function best in the so-called “wel-

fare states” whether they call themselves “socialist” or “capitalist.” What protects freedom is the division between governmental and economic power, or, to put it into Marxian language, the fact that the state and its constitution are not superstructures.

What protects us in the so-called “capitalist” countries of the West is not capitalism, but a legal system that prevents the daydreams of big-business management of trespassing into the private sphere of its employees from coming true. But this dream does come true wherever the government itself becomes the employer. It is no secret that the clearance system for American government employees does not respect private life; the recent appetite of certain governmental agencies to bug private homes could also be seen as an attempt on the part of the government to treat all citizens as prospective government employees. And what else is bugging but a form of expropriation? The government agency establishes itself as a kind of co-owner of the apartments and houses of citizens. In Russia no fancy gadgets in the walls are necessary; there, a spy sits in every citizen’s apartment anyhow.

If I were to judge these developments from a Marxian viewpoint, I would say: Perhaps expropriation is indeed in the very nature of modern production, and socialism is, as Marx believed, nothing but the inevitable result of industrial society as it was started by capitalism. Then the question is what can we do to get and keep this process under control so that it does not degenerate, under one name or another, into the monstrosities in which it has fallen in the East. In certain so-called “communist” countries—in Yugoslavia, for instance, but even in East Germany—there are attempts to decontrol and decentralize the economy, and very substantial concessions are being made in order to prevent the most horrifying consequences of

the expropriation process, which, fortunately enough, also has turned out to be very unsatisfactory for production once a certain point of centralization and enslavement of the workers has been reached.

Fundamentally it is a question of how much property and how many rights we can allow a person to possess even under the very inhuman conditions of much of modern economy. But nobody can tell me that there is such a thing as workers "owning their factories." Collective ownership is, if you reflect for a second, a contradiction in terms. Property is what belongs to me; ownership relates to what is my own by definition. Other people's means of production should not, of course, belong to me; they might perhaps be controlled by a third authority, which means they belong to no one. The worst possible owner would be the government, unless its powers in this economic sphere are strictly controlled and checked by a truly independent judiciary. Our problem today is not how to expropriate the expropriators, but, rather, how to arrange matters so that the masses, dispossessed by industrial society in capitalist and socialist systems, can regain property. For this reason alone, the alternative between capitalism and socialism is false—not only because neither exists anywhere in its pure state anyhow, but because we have here twins, each wearing a different hat.

The same state of affairs can be looked at from a different perspective—from that of the oppressed themselves—which does not make the result any better. In that case one must say that capitalism has destroyed the estates, the corporations, the guilds, the whole structure of feudal society. It has done away with all the collective groups which were a protection for the individual and for his property, which guaranteed him a certain security, though not, of course, complete safety. In their place it has put the "classes," essentially just two: the exploiters and the exploited. Now

the working class, simply because it was a class and a collective, still provided the individual with a certain protection, and later, when it learned to organize, it fought for and secured considerable rights for itself. The chief distinction today is not between socialist and capitalist countries but between countries that respect these rights, as, for instance, Sweden on one side, the United States on the other, and those that do not, as, for instance, Franco's Spain on one side, Soviet Russia on the other.

What then has socialism or communism, taken in its pure form, done? It has destroyed this class, too, its institutions, the unions and the labor parties, and its rights—collective bargaining, strikes, unemployment insurance, social security. In their stead, these regimes offered the illusion that the factories were the property of the working class, which as a class had just been abolished, and the atrocious lie that unemployment no longer existed, a lie based on nothing but the very real nonexistence of unemployment insurance. In essence, socialism has simply continued, and driven to its extreme, what capitalism began. Why should it be the remedy?

**Q:** Marxist intellectuals often emphasize that socialism, in spite of alienation, is always capable of regeneration through its own strength. As an ideal example of this regeneration there is the Czechoslovakian model of democratic socialism.

In view of the increase in military weapons by the Soviet Union and Soviet hegemony in other areas as well, how do you judge the chances of a new initiative for democratic socialism in the East, oriented in the spirit of the Czechoslovakian or Yugoslavian models?

**A:** What you just said in your first sentence really shocked me. To call Stalin's rule an "alienation" seems to



me a euphemism used to sweep under the rug not only facts, but the most hair-raising crimes as well. I say this to you simply to call your attention to how very much this jargon has already twisted the facts: To call something "alienation"—that is no less than a crime.

Now so far as economic systems and "models" are concerned, in time something will emerge from all the experimentation here and there if the great powers leave the small countries in peace. What that will be we cannot of course tell in a field so dependent on practice as economics. However, there will be experimentation first of all with the problem of ownership. On the basis of the very scanty information at my disposal, I would say that this is already happening in East Germany and in Yugoslavia with interesting results.

In East Germany, a kind of co-operative system, which does not derive at all from socialism and which has proved its worth in Denmark and in Israel, has been built into the "socialistic" economic system—thereby making it work. In Yugoslavia we have the "system of self-management" in the factories, a new version of the old "workers' councils," which, incidentally, also never became part of orthodox socialist or communist doctrine—despite Lenin's "all power to the *soviets*." (The councils, the only true outgrowth of the revolutions themselves as distinguished from revolutionary parties and ideologies, have been mercilessly destroyed precisely by the Communist party and by Lenin himself.)

None of these experiments redefines legitimate property in a satisfactory way, but they may be steps in this direction—the East German co-operatives by combining private ownership with the need for joint property in the means of production and distribution, the worker's councils by providing job security instead of the security of private

property. In both instances individual workers are no longer atomized but belong to a new collective, the co-operative or the factory's council, as a kind of compensation for membership in a class.

You ask also about the experiments and reforms. These have nothing to do with economic systems—except that the economic system should not be used to deprive people of their freedom. This is done when a dissenter or opponent becomes "unemployable" or when consumer goods are so scarce and life so uncomfortable that it is easy for the government to "buy" whole sections of the population. What people in the East do care about are freedom, civil rights, legal guarantees. For these are the conditions for being free to say, to write, and to print whatever one likes. The Soviet Union marched into Czechoslovakia not because of the new "economic model" but because of the *political* reforms connected with it. It did not march into East Germany, although today people there, as in other satellite countries, live better than in the Soviet Union and perhaps soon will live just as well and eventually even better than those in West Germany. And then the difference will be "only" that in one country people can say and, within limits, also do what they like and in the other they cannot. Believe me, *that* makes an enormous difference to everyone.

The Soviet Union has an interest in striking home wherever these economic experiments are joined to a struggle for freedom. Without doubt this was the case in Czechoslovakia. It is not the case in East Germany; therefore the German Democratic Republic is left in peace. Under Ulbricht's rule, the German Democratic Republic has become constantly more tyrannical ideologically the greater its economic concessions.

The Soviet Union must also strike home whenever it

fears that one of the satellite countries is breaking away from the Warsaw Pact. Whether this fear, certainly present, was justified in the case of Czechoslovakia I do not know, but I consider it possible. On the other hand, I do not believe that the Soviet Union will intervene militarily in Yugoslavia. It would encounter there a very considerable military opposition, and it cannot today afford this kind of confrontation. It is not that firmly seated in the saddle, being a great power.

Q: Do you give socialism as the dominant conception at present for the future of human society any chance of realization?

A: This naturally brings up the question again of what socialism really is. Even Marx hardly knew what he should concretely picture by that.

Q: If I may interrupt: What is meant is socialism, as I said before, oriented in the spirit of the Czechoslovakian or Yugoslavian model.

A: You mean, then, what today is called "socialistic humanism." This new slogan means no more than the attempt to undo the inhumanity brought about by socialism without reintroducing a so-called "capitalist" system, although the clear tendency in Yugoslavia toward an open market economy could very easily, and almost certainly will, be so interpreted, not only by the Soviet Union, but by all true believers.

Generally speaking, I would say that I grant a chance to all the small countries that want to experiment, whether they call themselves socialist or not, but I am very skeptical about the great powers. These mass societies can no longer be controlled, let alone governed. The Czechoslovakian and Yugoslavian models, if you take these two as examples, naturally have a chance. I would also include

perhaps Rumania, perhaps Hungary, where the revolution did not by any means end catastrophically, as it might have ended under Stalin—simply with the deportation of 50 per cent of the population. In all these countries something is going on, and it will be very hard to reverse their reform efforts, their attempts to escape from the worst consequences of dictatorship and to solve their economic problems independently and sensibly.

There is another factor we should take into account. The Soviet Union and, in various degrees, its satellite states are not nation-states, but are composed of nationalities. In each of them, the dictatorship is more or less in the hands of the dominant nationality, and the opposition against it always risks turning into a national liberation movement. This is especially true in the Soviet Union, where the Russian dictators always live in the fear of a collapse of the Russian empire—and not just a change of government.

This concern has nothing to do with socialism; it is, and always has been, an issue of sheer power politics. I don't think that the Soviet Union would have proceeded as it did in Czechoslovakia if it had not been worried about its own inner opposition, not only the opposition of the intellectuals, but the latent opposition of its own nationalities. One should not forget that during the Prague Spring the government granted considerable concessions to the Slovaks which only recently, certainly under Russian influence, were canceled. All attempts at decentralization are feared by Moscow. A new model—this means, to the Russians, not only a more humane handling of the economic or intellectual questions but also the threat of the decomposition of the Russian empire.

Q: I think the Soviet leaders' fear, specifically of the opposition of the intellectuals, plays a special role. After all, it is an opposition that today is making itself felt in a

wider field. There is even a civil-rights movement on the part of young intellectuals which operates with all available legal and, needless to say, also illegal means, such as underground newspapers, et cetera.

A: Yes, I am aware of that. And the leaders of the Soviet Union are naturally very much afraid of it. They are very much afraid that if the success of this movement extends to the people, as distinguished from the intellectuals, it could mean that the Ukrainians would once more want to have a state of their own, likewise the Tartars, who in any case were so abominably treated, and so on. Therefore the rulers of the Soviet Union are on an even shakier footing than the rulers in the satellite countries. But you see, too, that Tito in Yugoslavia is afraid of the problem of nationalities and not at all of so-called "capitalism."

Q: How do you account for the fact that the reform movement in the East—I am thinking not only of the much-cited Czechoslovakian model, but also of various publications by Soviet intellectuals advocating democratization of the Soviet Union, and similar protests—never put forward any form of capitalism, however modified, as an alternative to the system they are criticizing.

A: Well, I could say to you that these people are obviously of my opinion, that just as socialism is no remedy for capitalism, capitalism cannot be a remedy or an alternative for socialism. But I will not harp on that. The contest is never simply over an economic system. The economic system is involved only so far as a dictatorship hinders the economy from developing as productively as it would without dictatorial constraint. For the rest, it has to do with the political question: It has to do with what kind of state one wants to have, what kind of constitution, what kind of legisla-

tion, what sort of safeguards for the freedom of the spoken and printed word; that is, it has to do with what our innocent children in the West call "bourgeois freedom."

There is no such thing; freedom is freedom whether guaranteed by the laws of a "bourgeois" government or a "communist" state. From the fact that communist governments today do not respect civil rights and do not guarantee freedom of speech and association it does not follow that such rights and freedoms are "bourgeois." "Bourgeois freedom" is frequently and quite wrongly equated with the freedom to make more money than one actually needs. For this is the only "freedom" which the East, where in fact one can become extremely rich, respects, too. The contrast between rich and poor—if we are to talk a sensible language for once and not jargon—in respect to income is greater in the East than in most other countries, greater even than in the United States if you disregard a few thousand multimillionaires.

But that is not the point either. I repeat: The point is simply and singly whether I can say and print what I wish, or whether I cannot; whether my neighbors spy on me or don't. Freedom always implies freedom of dissent. No ruler before Stalin and Hitler contested the freedom to say yes—Hitler excluding Jews and gypsies from the right to consent and Stalin having been the only dictator who chopped off the heads of his most enthusiastic supporters, perhaps because he figured that whoever says yes can also say no. No tyrant before them went that far—and that did not pay off either.

None of these systems, not even that of the Soviet Union, is still truly totalitarian—though I have to admit that I am not in a position to judge China. At present only the people who dissent and are in the opposition are excluded, but this does not signify by any means that there is any

freedom there. And it is precisely in political freedom and assured basic rights that the opposition forces are interested—and rightly so.

Q: How do you stand on Thomas Mann's statement "Anti-bolshevism is the basic foolishness of our time"?

A: There are so many absurdities in our time that it is hard to assign first place. But, to speak seriously, antibolshevism as a theory, as an ism, is the invention of the ex-communists. By that I do not mean just any former bolsheviks or communists, but, rather, those who "believed" and then one day were personally disillusioned by Mr. Stalin; that is, people who were not really revolutionaries or politically engaged but who, as they themselves said, had lost a god and then went in search of a new god and also the opposite, a new devil. They simply reversed the pattern.

But to say that the mentality of these people changed, that instead of searching for beliefs they saw realities, took them into account, and attempted to change things is erroneous. Whether antibolshevists announce that the East is the devil, or bolshevists maintain that America is the devil, as far as their habits of thought go it amounts to the same thing. The mentality is still the same. It sees only black and white. In reality there is no such thing. If one does not know the whole spectrum of political colors of an epoch, cannot distinguish between the basic conditions of the different countries, the various stages of development, traditions, kinds and grades in production, technology, mentality, and so on, then one simply does not know how to move and take one's bearings in this field. One can do nothing but smash the world to bits in order finally to have before one's eyes one thing: plain black.

Q: At the end of *On Violence*, you write that we know "or should know that every decrease of power is an open invitation to violence—if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands . . . have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to substitute violence for it." What does this weighty sentence mean in respect to the present political situation in the United States?

A: I spoke earlier about the loss of power on the part of the great powers. If we consider this concretely, what does it mean? In all republics with representative governments, power resides in the people. That means that the people empower certain individuals to represent them, to act in their name. When we talk about loss of power, that signifies that the people have withdrawn their consent from what their representatives, the empowered elected officials, do.

Those who have been empowered naturally feel powerful; even when the people withdraw the basis of that power, the feeling of power remains. That is the situation in America—not only there, to be sure. This state of affairs, incidentally, has nothing to do with the fact that the people are divided, but, rather, is to be explained by loss of confidence in the so-called "system." In order to maintain the system, the empowered ones begin to act as rulers and resort to force. They substitute force for the assent of the people; that is the turning point.

How does this stand in America at present? The matter can be illustrated by various examples, but I would like to elucidate it chiefly by the war in Vietnam, which not only actually divides the people in the United States but, even more important, has caused a loss of confidence and thereby a loss of power. To be specific, it has produced

the "credibility gap," which means that those in power are no longer believed—quite apart from whether one agrees with them or not. I know that in Europe politicians never have been believed, that, indeed, people are of the opinion that politicians must and should lie as part of their trade. But that was not the case in America.

Naturally, there have always been state secrets which on specific grounds of practical politics needed to be strictly guarded. Often the truth was not told; but neither were direct lies. Now, as you know, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave the President a free hand in an undeclared war, was forced through Congress on the basis of a provably inaccurate presentation of the circumstances. This affair cost Johnson the presidency; also, the bitterness of the opposition in the Senate can hardly be explained without it. Since that time, among widening circles, the Vietnam war has been considered illegal—not only peculiarly inhuman, not only immoral, but *illegal*. In America that has a different weight than in Europe.

**Q:** And yet among American labor there is very strong agitation for the engagement of the United States in Vietnam. How is that to be explained in this connection?

**A:** The first impetus of opposition to the war came from the universities, especially from the student body, that is, from the same groups that were engaged in the civil-rights movement. This opposition was directed from the beginning against the so-called "system," whose most loyal supporters today are unquestionably to be found among the workers, that is, in the lower-income groups. (On Wall Street the so-called "capitalists" demonstrated against the government and the construction workers for it.) In this, the decisive part was played not so much by the question of the war as by the color problem.

It has turned out that in the eastern and northern parts of the country integration of the Negroes into the higher-income groups encounters no very serious or insuperable difficulties. Today everywhere it is really a *fait accompli*. Dwellings with relatively high rentals can be integrated if the black tenants belong to the same upper level as the white or yellow (especially the Chinese, who are everywhere especially favored as neighbors). Since the number of successful black businessmen is very small, this really applies to the academic and liberal professions—doctors, lawyers, professors, actors, writers, and so on.

The same integration in the middle and lower levels of the middle class, and especially among the workers who in respect to income belong to the upper level of the lower middle class, leads to catastrophe, and this indeed not only because the lower middle class happens to be particularly "reactionary," but because these classes believe, not without reason, that all these reforms relating to the Negro problem are being carried out at their expense. This can best be illustrated by the example of the schools. Public schools in America, including high schools, are free. The better these schools are, the greater are the chances for children without means to get into the colleges and universities, that is, to improve their social position. In the big cities this public-school system, under the weight of a very numerous, almost exclusively black *Lumpenproletariat*, has with very few exceptions broken down; these institutions, in which children are kept for twelve years without even learning to read and write, can hardly be described as schools. Now if a section of the city becomes black as a result of the policy of integration, then the streets run to seed, the schools are neglected, the children run wild—in short, the neighborhood very quickly becomes a slum. The principal sufferers, aside from the blacks themselves, are the Italians, the Irish, the Poles, and other ethnic groups

who are not poor but are not rich enough either to be able simply to move away or to send their children to the very expensive private schools.

This, however, is perfectly possible for the upper classes, though often at the cost of considerable sacrifice. People are perfectly right in saying that soon in New York only the very poor and the very rich will be able to live. Almost all the white residents who can do so send their children either to private schools, which are often very good, or to the principally Catholic denominational schools. Negroes belonging to the upper levels can also do this. The working class cannot, nor can the lower middle class. What makes these people especially bitter is that the middle-class liberals have put through laws whose consequences they do not feel. They demand integration of the public schools, elimination of neighborhood schools (black children, who in large measure are simply left to neglect, are transported in buses out of the slums into schools in predominantly white neighborhoods), forced integration of neighborhoods—and send their own children to private schools and move to the suburbs, something that only those at a certain income level can afford.

To this another factor is added, which is present in other countries as well. Marx may have said that the proletariat has no country; it is well known that the proletarians have never shared this point of view. The lower social classes are especially susceptible to nationalism, chauvinism, and imperialistic policies. One serious split in the civil-rights movement into "black" and "white" came as a result of the war question: the white students coming from good middle-class homes at once joined the opposition, in contrast to the Negroes, whose leaders were very slow in making up their minds to demonstrate against the war in Vietnam. This was true even of Martin Luther King. The

fact that the army gives the lower social classes certain opportunities for education and vocational training naturally also plays a role here.

Q: You reproach the New Left in West Germany with, among other things, having never "concerned itself seriously with the recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line, which, after all, is one of the crucial issues of German foreign policy and has been the touchstone of German nationalism ever since the defeat of the Hitler regime." I doubt that your thesis can be maintained in this uncompromising form, for the German New Left is also urging the recognition, not only of the Oder-Neisse Line by Bonn, but of the German Democratic Republic as well. However, the New Left is isolated from the general population, and it is not within its power to give practical political reality to such theoretical demands. But even if the numerically extremely weak New Left were to intervene "seriously" for the recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line would German nationalism thereby suffer a decisive defeat?

A: As far as practical political consequences are concerned, a change of policies in Persia was certainly even less likely. The trouble with the New Left is that it obviously cares about nothing less than eventual consequences of its demonstrations. In contrast to the Shah of Persia, the Oder-Neisse Line is a matter of direct responsibility for every German citizen; to demonstrate for its recognition and to go on record on this issue make sense regardless of practical political consequences. It proves nothing whatsoever if the New Left comes out "also" for the recognition of the new boundary with Poland—as many good liberal Germans have done. The point is that this issue has never been at the center of their propaganda, which means

simply that they dodge all matters that are real and involve direct responsibility. This is true of their theories as well as of their practices.

There are two possible explanations for this shirking of an eminently practical issue. I have so far mentioned only German nationalism, of which, all rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, one might also suspect the New Left. The second possibility would be that this movement in its German version has indulged in so much high-flown theoretical nonsense that it cannot see what is in front of its nose. This seems to have been the case at the time of the Emergency Laws—the *Notstandsgesetze*. You remember how late the student movement was in becoming aware that something of considerable importance was happening in Parliament, certainly of greater importance for Germany than the visit of oriental potentates.

When the American students demonstrate against the war in Vietnam, they are demonstrating against a policy of immediate interest to their country and to themselves. When the German students do the same, it is pretty much as with the Shah of Persia; there is not the slightest possibility of their being personally held to account. Passionate interest in international affairs in which no risk and no responsibility are involved has often been a cloak to hide down-to-earth national interests; in politics, idealism is frequently no more than an excuse for not recognizing unpleasant realities. Idealism can be a form of evading reality altogether, and this, I think, is much more likely the case here. The New Left simply overlooked the issue, and that means it overlooked the single moral question that, in postwar Germany, was still really open and subject to debate. And it also overlooked one of the few decisive international political issues in which Germany would have been able to play a significant role after the end of World

War II. The failure of the German government, especially under Adenauer, to recognize the Oder-Neisse Line in time has contributed a great deal to the consolidation of the Soviet satellite system. It ought to be perfectly clear to everyone that fear of Germany on the part of the satellite nations has decisively slowed down, and in part rendered impossible, all reform movements in Eastern Europe. The fact that not even the Left, New or Old, dared to touch this most sensitive point of postwar Germany could only strengthen considerably this fear.

Q: To come back once more to your study *On Violence*: in it (that is, in its German version) you write: "So long as national independence, namely, freedom from foreign rule, and the sovereignty of the state, namely, the claim to unchecked and unlimited power in foreign affairs, are identified—and no revolution has thus far been able to shake this state concept—not even a theoretical solution of the problem of war, on which depends not so much the future of mankind as the question of whether mankind will have a future, is so much as conceivable, and a guaranteed peace on earth is as utopian as the squaring of the circle." What other conception of the state do you have in mind?

A: What I have in mind is not so much a different state concept as the necessity of changing this one. What we call the "state" is not much older than the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the same thing is true of the concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty means, among other things, that conflicts of an international character can ultimately be settled only by war; there is no other last resort. Today, however, war—quite apart from all pacifist considerations—among the great powers has become impossible owing to the monstrous development of the means of vio-

lence. And so the question arises: What is to take the place of this last resort?

War has, so to speak, become a luxury which only the small nations can still afford, and they only so long as they are not drawn into the spheres of influence of the great powers and do not possess nuclear weapons themselves. The great powers interfere in these wars in part because they are obliged to defend their clients and in part because this has become an important piece of the strategy of mutual deterrence on which the peace of the world today rests.

Between sovereign states there can be no last resort except war; if war no longer serves that purpose, that fact alone proves that we must have a new concept of the state. This new concept of the state, to be sure, will not result from the founding of a new international court that would function better than the one at The Hague, or a new League of Nations, since the same conflicts between sovereign or ostensibly sovereign governments can only be played out there all over again—on the level of discourse, to be sure, which is more important than is usually thought.

The mere rudiments I see for a new state concept can be found in the federal system, whose advantage it is that power moves neither from above nor from below, but is horizontally directed so that the federated units mutually check and control their powers. For the real difficulty in speculating on these matters is that the final resort should not be *supernational* but *international*. A *supernational* authority would either be ineffective or be monopolized by the nation that happens to be the strongest, and so would lead to world government, which could easily become the most frightful tyranny conceivable, since from its global police force there would be no escape—until it finally fell apart.

Where do we find models that could help us in constructing, at least theoretically, an *international* authority as the highest control agency? This sounds like a paradox, since what is highest cannot well be in between, but it is nevertheless the real question. When I said that none of the revolutions, each of which overthrew one form of government and replaced it with another, had been able to shake the state concept and its sovereignty, I had in mind something that I tried to elaborate a bit in my book *On Revolution*. Since the revolutions of the eighteenth century, every large upheaval has actually developed the rudiments of an entirely new form of government, which emerged independent of all preceding revolutionary theories, directly out of the course of the revolution itself, that is, out of the experiences of action and out of the resulting will of the actors to participate in the further development of public affairs.

This new form of government is the council system, which, as we know, has perished every time and everywhere, destroyed either directly by the bureaucracy of the nation-states or by the party machines. Whether this system is a pure utopia—in any case it would be a people's utopia, not the utopia of theoreticians and ideologies—I cannot say. It seems to me, however, the single alternative that has ever appeared in history, and has reappeared time and again. Spontaneous organization of council systems occurred in all revolutions, in the French Revolution, with Jefferson in the American Revolution, in the Parisian commune, in the Russian revolutions, in the wake of the revolutions in Germany and Austria at the end of World War I, finally in the Hungarian Revolution. What is more, they never came into being as a result of a conscious revolutionary tradition or theory, but entirely spontaneously, each time as though there had never been anything of the sort before. Hence the council system seems to cor-



respond to and to spring from the very experience of political action.

In this direction, I think, there must be something to be found, a completely different principle of organization, which begins from below, continues upward, and finally leads to a parliament. But we can't talk about that now. And it is not necessary, since important studies on this subject have been published in recent years in France and Germany, and anyone seriously interested can inform himself.

To prevent a misunderstanding that might easily occur today, I must say that the communes of hippies and drop-outs have nothing to do with this. On the contrary, a renunciation of the whole of public life, of politics in general, is at their foundation; they are refuges for people who have suffered political shipwreck—and as such they are completely justified on personal grounds. I find the forms of these communes very often grotesque—in Germany as well as in America—but I understand them and have nothing against them. Politically they are meaningless. The councils desire the exact opposite, even if they begin very small—as neighborhood councils, professional councils, councils within factories, apartment houses, and so on. There are, indeed, councils of the most various kinds, by no means only workers' councils; workers' councils are a special case in this field.

The councils say: We want to participate, we want to debate, we want to make our voices heard in public, and we want to have a possibility to determine the political course of our country. Since the country is too big for all of us to come together and determine our fate, we need a number of public spaces within it. The booth in which we deposit our ballots is unquestionably too small, for this booth has room for only one. The parties are completely

unsuitable; there we are, most of us, nothing but the manipulated electorate. But if only ten of us are sitting around a table, each expressing his opinion, each hearing the opinions of others, then a rational formation of opinion can take place through the exchange of opinions. There, too, it will become clear which one of us is best suited to present our view before the next higher council, where in turn our view will be clarified through the influence of other views, revised, or proved wrong.

By no means every resident of a country needs to be a member in such councils. Not everyone wants to or has to concern himself with public affairs. In this fashion a self-selective process is possible that would draw together a true political elite in a country. Anyone who is not interested in public affairs will simply have to be satisfied with their being decided without him. But each person must be given the opportunity.

In this direction I see the possibility of forming a new concept of the state. A council-state of this sort, to which the principle of sovereignty would be wholly alien, would be admirably suited to federations of the most various kinds, especially because in it power would be constituted horizontally and not vertically. But if you ask me now what prospect it has of being realized, then I must say to you: Very slight, if at all. And yet perhaps, after all—in the wake of the next revolution.