EXCURSUS I

William Carey McWilliams
Traits or Spies Might Serve Us Better

There are no traitors or spies in the Congress of the United States, which is a pity.

In counterespionage, when one has infiltrated an enemy’s network or broken his codes, it is important to let some useful information get through in order to preserve the secret of one’s success, thus lulling the enemy into a false sense of security. Just so, traitors in high places must—in order to preserve their sensitive and important positions—appear to be patriots and must, perchance, render some real service to those they betray. Kurt Vonnegut’s Mother Night portrays an Allied agent so useful as a Nazi propagandist that it is difficult to tell which side he has served best. Vonnegut warned all potential traitors (and all of us), “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be very careful what we pretend to be.” But one need not go to extremes; what matters is that traitors must preserve the appearances and do something valuable for those they nominally serve.

Congressional liberals are under no such constraint. Free from disloyalty, they are also free from any necessity to serve the interests of the United States.

No traitor, I think, would imagine that he could safely adopt the Congressional majority’s position on Angola. The argument that Angola is “another Vietnam” is too thin to bear examination, the validity of such historical analogies (“another Munich”) aside. In Angola the MPLA is a city movement; it is supported, if not propped up, by a sizable foreign army; it is opposed by all Angola’s immediate neighbors. In all of these it resembles the late South Vietnamese regime more than that government’s opponents.

To be sure, half the African states have recognized the MPLA. But then a majority of Asian states mumbled supportive words (albeit rather covertly) about the United States presence in Vietnam. In any event, counting recognitions is a poor way to conduct foreign policy. Not so long ago the majority of states recognized Taiwan as the government of China.

One wonders what the Congressional response would have been if Cuba had dispatched many thousands of its soldiers to Venezuela or Bolivia, which was a live possibility a short while back. There is more than a hint of racism in liberal indifference to Angola, but the blinders of liberal ideology may be explanation enough. The reasoning that damns Savimbi, Roberto, and their supporters because of South African support is only a rationalization for indifference. Roberto and Savimbi have been in the field against Portuguese colonialism for years; their credentials as patriots are beyond reproach. What must it have cost them to accept South African aid? They must have seen the issues as supremely critical to make South African assistance tolerable. But the Afrikaners at least care about Angola, however perverse their reasons and their goals, and faute de mieux their aid is some answer to Soviet-Cuban intervention. The American liberal answer to blacks—in the American cities or in Africa—is verbal sympathy and real indifference.

Of course, the American conservatives are worse, which makes this bicentennial election year an unpleasant prospect. So far, however, the Congress has succeeded in refurbishing the case for Presidential government: it has been untrustworthy, sensationalistic, cheaply political (as in Senator Church’s desperate effort to protect JFK’s reputation), and visibly incapable of any concern for the common good beyond the negation of the President’s fumblings.

The Congressional liberals mean well, which damns with faint praise; the actively disloyal would probably do no worse and might serve us better.

EXCURSUS II

Richard W. Wilson
Chou En-lai: Urbanity, Ruthlessness, and Conscience

One of the most colorful yet terrible periods in the history of the world is ending. While we cannot guess what the future will hold, whether Armageddon, utopia, or some point in between, it is clear that the period of European imperialism, of cataclysmic world wars, and of shattering revolutions is rapidly drawing to a close. The death of Chou En-lai, late Premier of the People’s Republic of China, is one of the last acts in this drama. While tales spun in the future about the twentieth century may never place, Chou as the central figure, his name, his style, and the ideas for which he stood will reverberate as long as historical records of our time exist.

Born in the waning years of the nineteenth century into a still very traditional Chinese society beset by foreign powers and internal woes, men and women like Chou En-lai, although only a handful at first, responded to the shame and humiliation of their people with vigorous steps to build a new and powerful China. How successfully their work was done can only be gauged by viewing the People’s Republic of China of today against the virtually defenseless and prostrate China of the first decades of this century. While Chou En-lai himself became a famed participant in the councils
of the world powers, he was in many ways only a
larger-than-life representative of all those millions
whose toil and suffering created a new China. The
road from one of the most traditional to one of the
most revolutionary societies in the world was
fraught with the greatest danger. Only a smiling
fortune, an astonishing luck, seems to have kept
Chou alive throughout this tumultuous period. He
was immersed very early in student outrage
against China's plight. Later, during a brief period
in France during the First World War, he was in-
trduced to communism, which gave him a lifelong
framework within which to act out his revolutionary
aspirations. Chou was active in the first stirrings of
communism in China, rapidly became a major
leader, and through all the major party factional
disputes of more than fifty years was never far
from the center of power. In the nineteen twenties,
when the Nationalist and Communist parties
cooperated under Sun Yat-sen in efforts to unify
China, Chou was political commissar to Chiang
Kai-shek. Surviving, once only barely, the brutal
suppression of the Communists by the Nationalists
in 1927, Chou participated in the incessant fighting
of the next years and was one of the heroes of the
legendary Long March of the mid-thirties when the
remnants of the Communist forces moved from
central to northwest China.

Preceding and during the Second World War,
when the Nationalists and Communists again
cooperated, this time against a cruel Japanese
imperialism, Chou was the Communist emissary in
Chungking, where he presented the Communist
case to the Nationalists and their American allies.
Following the defeat of Japan and the renewal of
full-scale civil war that culminated in 1949 in a
Communist victory, Chou entered the new gov-
ernment as its premier and remained for the rest of
his life at the core of a decision-making process
that has reshaped the social and political founda-
tions of China. From mandarin to revolutionary he
exhibited a remarkable fusion of scholarly and
administrative skills. In the mix of talents the
Communist leaders of China brought to their
movement Chou's contributions were of enormous
importance.

For many, no doubt, the death of Chou En-lai is
but a harbinger of the eventual demise of Mao
Tse-tung. Then truly will the first phase of the
Communist revolution in China be at an end. What
will happen then? Much speculation surrounds
who the coming leadership of China will be. While
the personalities of the contenders are clearly im-
portant, the thrust of policies already undertaken is
perhaps of more basic significance. Barring a
major war for China, it is hard to imagine a rever-
sal of many of the trends already under way. For
instance, China, with Japan, is one of the two
major Asian powers of our current world. Given a
pattern of increasing population control and sus-
tained economic growth, it is difficult not to foresee
the ultimate preeminent position for China in Asia
and, perhaps, in the world; it may also, however,
work to stabilize relations in Asia, which, after all,
like Europe, has been an arena for war in the
twentieth century. Such problems as those that
now exist over the status of Taiwan will surely fade
as China's self-confidence and power increase.

Internally the phenomenon of exhortation to
progress by ideological commitment is likely to be-
come less disruptive of economic planning. This
does not mean an end to ideological fervor nor a
rolling back of the commune system on the land or
a turn away from the drive for greater egal-
itarianism in other areas of life. Rather there
will be a firmer absorption of the Communist ethic
into the framework of the national assumptions by
which Chinese live. Mao Tse-tung and men like
Chou En-lai have done their best to break down
traditional patterns of thought, feeling, and be-
behavior, and we can expect this process to con-
tinue. Indeed, as Chou En-lai espoused, the need
for many cultural revolutions for numberless years
to come is inherent in the notion of progress. The
initial and decisive blows against the old order,
however, have been delivered by the first genera-
tion of Communist leaders. While struggle will con-
tinue, one cannot see a turning away by the new
Communist-educated generation from the road
that has been charted.

The political and social system of China today is
not a congenial one for liberal democrats, and it
may never be so. The means by which this system
came into being is also foreign to those bred to the
notions of parliamentary procedure. Chou En-lai
lived through, and was molded by, extraordinarily
violent and cruel events. His personal response to
China's needs was sometimes ruthless and some-
times urbane and was always infused with intelli-
gence and with ideological commitment and zeal.
Today China is a country proud of itself and freed
from the shackles of decades of misery. In the light
of his own conscience this extraordinary man
worked with unparalleled constancy of purpose
against the plundering of society and for the bet-
terment of mankind.

Robert W. Wilson is Director of International Pro-
grams and Professor of Political Science at Rut-
gers.