

in the magazines

From playwright/English department member, James Harvey, some interesting reflections on a recent visit to Cuba (*Commonweal*, December 19).

On propaganda: "... One of the things that puzzled me at first was the impression I had that people I met by chance on the street sometimes tended to look embarrassed and evasive if I praised the Revolution to them. That was before I fully registered the relentlessness of the propaganda. Praising the Revolution to the man on a Havana street must be a bit like, say, walking into the outer lobby of the *Chicago Tribune* to say: Yes, you *are* 'The World's Greatest Newspaper'—or like telling the students at a Catholic boarding school that they have a great church going for them. The government devotes so much print and space to such praise that far from allaying suspicion much of the time, I would think they might even provoke it.

"For example, the stories in *Granma* and *Juventud* about U.S. control and intervention in Latin America contained, as far as I could tell, almost nothing that wasn't true (what need to invent?)—but somehow and unfortunately none of it *sounded* true. . . . An inevitable problem with a controlled press. The excess of propaganda puts off a lot of Havanans too, I gather. Anyway I was told by them it's mainly meant for the country people—these masses of the newly literate who are one of the Revolution's most extraordinary accomplishments. They at least—so the argument ran—really need and take heart from its affirmations of national pride, its reassurances and predictions of success, its incitements to greater efforts—for them, the excess works. Which may be quite true for all I know. But there's a disturbing condescension in the idea.

"But just as often the propaganda I saw seemed skillful and intelligent—as in Cuban newsreels and documentaries. . . . Direct, sensible, honest and outspoken about mistakes made and setbacks encountered, full above all of the most remarkable good will and good humor. When *Granma* too reflects these qualities—combined with the constant note of revolutionary dedication—it can be not only worth reading, but compelling and moving in just the ways it means to be. The problem is, I would think, that that kind of thing is almost all in the way of news-writing the Cubans do have to read. . . ."

On the New Left: "For above all Cuba makes clear by contrast how extraordinarily self-indulgent American radicalism is, has been, and threatens to go on being. Particularly in its persisting confusion between self-realization of various sorts and radical social action. For one large example, the kind of thing on the Left that is sometimes described as 'searching for alternate life-styles.' A category that has been made to include at times such gestures as smoking pot,

exchanging declarations of love in public, starting rock bands, defending and promoting pornography, frightening and bullying deans and teachers whose strongest wish is to be liked and thought 'with it,' and so on.

"Whatever may be said for or against these activities, they are *not* blows against imperialism, against the socio-economic system, nor even against the status quo, which partly exists to absorb and exploit them, if only to divert the boredom of the rest of us—to thicken the climate of poisonous silliness that's become as natural to us now as our lethal air. In short—as Cuba makes clear—defiant self-expression is *not* a revolutionary act. It is not even necessarily a good thing in itself—let alone a socially beneficial one. . . ."

"The meaning and the impact of the present change in American political life are to be found in three developments: first, the fact that domestic politics have become decisively dependent on foreign policy; second, the decay of democratic control over and commitment to government; and third, the failure of political leadership to respond to this difficult and changing situation. Protest is a portent—both protester and policy-maker would be advised to read its omens rightly." This is the thesis Wilson Carey McWilliams develops in "Democracy, Publics and Protest: The Problem of Foreign Policy," appearing in the *Journal of International Affairs* (No. 2, 1969).

"Liberal and radical criticism of American foreign policy is not new," he writes, "but until recently it did not touch the chord of mass response, simply because it has tended to ask for *more* and not less sacrifice. . . ."

"If radicals have not moved America at large, it is because they still ask a sacrifice: the acknowledgment of defeat [in Vietnam], a sacrifice which must be a *willing* one because it cannot be compelled. If they have gained a mass following among the young, even a sympathetic eye must see that it has something to do with the fact that protest has offered a ready rationalization. (It is precisely because an older generation is so experienced in the process of self-betrayal and self-deceit that it is so ready to admire the 'idealism' of the young while deploring their 'tactics'; a more accurate seeing might reverse the proposition.) Being jailed for one's convictions is heroic—though even jail has some taint of suspicion in wartime—but the mass of 'resistance' has taken the subtle form of evasion, whether by flight to Canada or into exempt status. . . . Proposals for a general amnesty, ignoring the difference between those who fought or were jailed for doing what they felt their civic duty and
(Continued on p. 5)

in the magazines . . .

(Continued from p. 2)

those who evaded that duty, suggest a feeling that little can be legitimately asked of modern Americans. ('In a good state,' Rousseau commented, 'there are few criminals; in a bad one, many pardons.') . . ."

In three recent issues of *The New Yorker*, Richard Harris discussed the effects of the shift in leadership in the Justice Department and took a look at the politics of Attorney General Mitchell, the man who is said to be a key advisor to the President on matters of foreign policy as well. The following are from the issue of November 22.

"Other people were less entertained by . . . Mitchell's appointment than they were apprehensive about his lack of legal experience outside the narrow field of municipal-bond law, which he had practiced for thirty years, about his evident lack of contact and sympathy with the disenfranchised and the young, about his role as Nixon's campaign manager, which constituted his sole participation in national affairs, and especially about his part in carrying out the so-called 'Southern Strategy' . . .

" . . . Beside his promise to take action against 'activist' demonstrators and his support for preventive detention—both of which struck former members of the Department as purely political moves—he had placed political figures in the three most important positions, aside from his own, in the Department. . . . In view of Mitchell's unfamiliarity with the governing process on a national scale, his well-known disdain for social theory, and his ignorance of the historical background of the contending forces in the country, there was no reason to believe that he was aware of the threat to the commonweal he was creating. And in view of his single-minded dedication to the President's political fortunes, there was no reason to believe that he would alter his course even if he became aware of it. . . ."

And finally: "Perhaps the best way to judge Mitchell's stewardship of the high office he holds is by accepting his earlier suggestion [to a group of Negro civil-rights workers]: 'You will be better advised to watch what we do instead of what we say.' Anyone who watches with any care must be compelled to conclude that the policies of Barry Goldwater and the right wing, which the voters overwhelmingly repudiated in 1964, have become the policies of the government today. Most people no longer seem to care—if, indeed, they know—what is happening to their country. Exhausted by the demands of modern life and muddled by the fearful discord tearing at society, they seem to have turned their common fate over to their leaders in a way that would have been inconceivable five years ago, when the public rejected

extremist appeals for more war in Vietnam and less justice at home. And their leaders—convinced that this abdication means agreement, and that agreement means the public interest is being served—manage the people's affairs in a way that can only divide the country further. When the people finally awaken, they may find their freedoms gone, because the abandonment of the rule of law must bring on tyranny. Since it is the majority's fear—fear of black men, fear of crime, fear of disorder, fear even of differences—that allows repression to flourish, those who succumb to their fears are as responsible as those who make political use of them. And in the end both will suffer equally. 'For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.'"

Although at another time, many firms engaging in defense work "flourished on such business," today "the facts indicate otherwise," says George E. Berkley ("The Myth of War Profiteering," *The New Republic*, December 20 and 27). "In 1965, the top five defense contractors were General Dynamics, Lockheed, Douglas, General Electric and United Aircraft. By the beginning of 1969, one of the big five, Douglas, had been squeezed out of existence; a second one, Lockheed, was in trouble. Of the three remaining, two were under severe financial pressure. For many war contractors, Vietnam has been a headache; for others it has been disaster."

Poor profit margins are one reason, Berkley finds, and the reasons for this development are several: Robert McNamara's stewardship of the Defense Department under which purchasing policy changed "from a cost-plus to a fixed fee basis"; increased "outlets for civilian business" which have forced aerospace industries into such "uneconomic practices" as overtime work and the hiring of less skilled employees to meet "the influx of war orders piled on top of civilian billings"; and inflation.

"Those industries specifically geared for defense contracting," notes the author, "do remain in the armaments-making race and often bid zealously on such work. Despite the flood of defense orders which the Vietnam war has brought them, however, most munitions makers have succeeded in gradually increasing their commercial business. The industrial end of the military-industrial complex is seeking to extricate itself from the dubious and often dismal fortunes of war. . . ."

" . . . Improbable though it may seem, many defense suppliers, motivated by sheer greed, may eventually join other industry leaders, Wall Street speculators and such business-oriented magazines as *Fortune* and *Forbes* in calling for a curtailment in defense spending and a shift to the more lucrative pursuits of peace."

PAMPHILUS