

*Visions of China*, printed in black and white and using camera photography in one of its gentler modes, attempts the impossible: to encompass a generation of change in a country whose size and complexity is beyond human comprehension. We get an impression of arbitrary rules, a sense of the regularization (we call it regimentation) of an unimaginable mass of human beings. The book leads my thoughts back to America and the suggestions that are now made in increasing number and with growing intensity about doing something of the same sort here in the name of what is good and true. It puts me in mind of that itinerant fourteenth-century Bulgarian preacher who encouraged men to sin that the grace of repentance might be given them. Must we, have we, come to logic such as this? [WV]

**TRADITION**  
by Edward Shils

(University of Chicago Press; 334 pp.; \$20.00)

Edith Kurzweil

Tradition, though necessary for survival, is dying; and even such books as *The Tradition of the New*, *The Tradition of Modernity*, and *The Symbolist Tradition* deal with only their specific subjects and forget about the idea of tradition itself. Or so argues Edward Shils. He believes that to avoid doom, modern societies must make conscious efforts to perpetuate traditions, and particularly the "tradition of traditionality." Substantive traditions have been explicitly and implicitly attacked by science and rationality and need defending against unfair associations with dogmatism, superstition, or religiosity—and most of all against Marxists of all stripes, against the counterculture, and against the various liberation movements. These themes were already evident in Professor Shils's many incisive essays on science, social science, and policy questions, and particularly in *The Intellectuals and the Powers* (1972), although now he perceives himself more directly indebted to the "spirits of Max Weber and T. S. Eliot."

Like Eliot and many other literary critics, Shils locates the beginning of a tension between the sciences and the humanities in the Enlightenment, in

the increasing belief in science at the expense of religion, and in all the related questions about truth, morality, authority, and natural law. And like Weber, Shils examines systematically the ensuing contradictions. Both men perceive the "victory" of rationality—of truth and facts—without accepting as necessary an attendant decline or subversion of moral values—in politics, language, or in applications of technology. *Tradition* is a plea for the retention of what was best in the past and a brief for certain old-fashioned values—honesty and morality on the one hand and intellectual rigor on the other. But Shils's zeal to preserve traditions leads him at times to a frozen politics that exaggerate, for instance, the impact of the 1968 movements and ignore their failure and the ensuing backlash. The otherwise impressive scholarly references rarely go beyond 1970; they are restricted to Anglo-Saxon and German sources and to a rather narrow, Parsonian interpretation of Weber.

Shils quotes and analyzes Weber's many juxtapositions—tradition vs. science, religion vs. disenchantment, old-fashioned vs. modern—in order to show that Weber, while focusing on the progress of science, did not mean to imply that the new is better than the old. (This interpretation is aimed at intellectuals who play down the differences between Marx and Weber.) Professor Shils does concede that each generation, though in the grip of its past, has the chance to begin anew; but he emphasizes that such beginnings are kept in check through family and religious and educational institutions, even when these are partially or entirely rejected. Marxists, from Lenin to Althusser, would agree with this of course, although they propose to effect the total break Shils fears. He, on the other hand, goes on to underline how the past is internalized, assimilated, and memorized by individuals; how it lives on through ethnic identity, the Old Testament, the Gospels, Greek and Roman historiographies, Islamic or Buddhist religion, and how through the reservation and veneration of art and literature, buildings and monuments, or the collecting of antiques and documents, attachment to tradition is manifested—even by the Soviets, who have broken with and condemned bourgeois culture only to enshrine its artifacts.

As Professor Shils develops his ideas, he denigrates his opponents'. Jürgen

Habermas's notion that in the modern world system "technology has got out of control" is countered by the argument that "the tradition of technological innovation has existed since antiquity" and that inventions never were kept within national boundaries. He finds antihistorical the *Annales* concept of *longue durée*, finds the Frankfurt School not only full of "leftist dogma," but its antitraditionality itself a tradition; and he attacks all the social sciences—except to some extent economics—for their lack of historicity. Most of all Shils dismisses the Marxists' ritualistic references to man-the-maker-of-his-own-history. Of course Marx went on to add that man does not create his history out of whole cloth. Shils, though, is looking to preservation rather than to historical change. His concern is on traces of the past in oral and written traditions, religions, philosophy, and in the creation of science; the very selection of problems depends upon a body of valid and accepted knowledge. Since each discipline has a history, its origins can never be erased. Some, like sociology or the natural sciences, assimilate only their recent past. Literature, on the other hand, deals simultaneously with its entire tradition from antiquity to the present, reinterpreting, disseminating, and evaluating. Still, authors are judged by their authenticity, their genius, their originality, says Shils, and the fact that they are linked to a tradition tends to be overlooked.

In matters of theory Shils adheres strictly to Max Weber—a Weber whose "legitimate political order is ultimately charismatic." But charisma is played down subtly, allowing for an emphasis on the oppositions between rationality and tradition. As this relationship is explored, tradition is examined from every angle, as it forms attachments, reinstates the past, rationalizes, corrects perceptions, and much more. The intent of science to change traditions is contrasted with the way traditions are basic to religion, literature, and art. Depending upon the political system they "inhabit," these may turn into normative traditions. Because tradition is protean, Shils has much leeway in proving how the flouting of traditions—Baudelaire's green hair or Oscar Wilde's lobster on a leash—is not the complete negation of bourgeois traditions. According to Shils, traditions change constantly, lose adherents, re-surge and are revived, but the intent of

new generations in modern Western societies to abandon them has damaged them severely. The author not only asks for a reversal of this attitude, but argues that we need traditions even to hold onto the advances of science, including social science. Because rational arguments based on "scientific" ends are used on every side of every argument, he perceives rationalization, along with hedonism, individualism, and ideals of emancipation, as the enemies of tradition; these may be necessary and desirable goals, but they ought not be opposed to tradition or manipulated to attain political or emotional ends.

For Shils such illegitimate or partisan use of reason and science does not bode well for the transmission of traditions or for the "creative tradition-seeking capacities" of individuals. He is not alone in his despair, and many of the reasons for his pessimism are well founded. Yet he consistently overrates the influence of radicals and of the "lumpen-intelligentsia," using heavy artillery to shoot down balloons. No one believes anymore—least of all the Left—that the elimination of tradition can in itself create a new social order. Had Shils read some of the literature of the Left he would have been aware of its splits, its problems, and its marginality. In any event, exaggerating the danger on the Left will not save tradition. But a truly Weberian method at the service of "neutralizing" Professor Shils's prejudices along with those of the Left could provide a more objective analysis that might, in fact, reinstate a more pervasive appreciation of the past. It might even preserve the best of it.

## **SOCIAL POWER AND POLITICAL FREEDOM**

by Gene Sharp

(Porter Sargent; 456 pp.; \$15.95/\$8.95)

*Charles Bloomstein*

Of the leading political figures of our time, Gandhi is clearly among those most neglected. Since his assassination in 1948, interest in his theories has waned, and today there are few who see him as a master political strategist.

Gene Sharp has spent some thirty years studying Gandhi and developing the variety of political techniques the Mahatma sponsored. He takes here a

pragmatic, instrumentalist approach to the problems of violence, power, and social control and asserts that we will not rid ourselves of war, dictatorship, genocide, and economic injustice so long as we accept violence as the ultimate social sanction. It is the violence itself that abets those evils.

All theoreticians of democracy and its values agree that the capacity to govern rests fundamentally on the acceptance by the governed of the legitimacy and authority of those governing. Terror, oppression, and punishment all serve to reinforce that acceptance but cannot be effective in its absence. This is true for all forms of government, from popular democracies to tyrannies, including totalitarian states—and Iran has provided us with a very dramatic illustration of that fact.

Sharp goes further and argues that those who control the apparatus of violence, in the form of a police and prison system and a centralized military, inevitably constitute a privileged political class, controlling economic and social areas as well and making impossible a democratic socialist or humanitarian society. Noting that sanctions are essential for the stability and domestic tranquillity of any society, Sharp insists that a wide range of alternative and nonviolent measures are available, measures that would be effective and lead to a more equitable social order.

If vigilance is the price of liberty, turning over the defense of that value to a centralized military cannot nurture that vigilance. Sharp argues for what he calls a civilian-based defense of national security. The people as a whole must be imbued with the value of freedom and be willing to defend it against foreign invasion and domestic usurpation by would-be dictators. Both threats can be defeated, Sharp is convinced, by nonviolent noncooperation and resistance, expressed in strikes, general strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience.

Such nonviolent resistance has occurred from time to time in the past, and Sharp has documented almost two hundred variations of resistance techniques. No technique has succeeded in full, although some have been partially effective, especially where the goals were limited. But, Sharp claims, these past instances all took place under the most adverse circumstances possible; they were spontaneous, lacking any prior preparation or training. What is needed, therefore, is planning and

training of the population at large, with allocation of resources and funds, and continued exploration of strategies and tactics. Such a civilian-based defense would succeed, not by conversion of the opponent, but by coercion. It is risky, to be sure, but not as risky as war and violence in terms of its ultimate economic, social, and human costs. And in the process of obtaining its immediate objectives, it can help in bettering the human condition. War and violence clearly do not.

There is more to Sharp's argument. Many of its particulars will be agreed to by those concerned with human freedom and dignity, but the whole is difficult to accept, conditioned as we are by our experience and convictions. There are questions we must ask, even if we assume that the techniques will work. How do we arrive at this vigilant public, when what we see in our country is increasing apathy? How do we decentralize power, one of Sharp's goals, when in every society, developed or developing, centralization is the order of the day? How, when all our history shows that people are willing to kill and die for the defense of what they hold dear, do we get people willing to risk all while eschewing killing? And who will bell the cat? Which country will be first? Can we ask Israel, for example, to lead the way?

There are many more questions and objections, and Sharp is aware of them. He knows that his work is literally in its beginning stages and is thus asking that others join him, that exploration and study be carried on more widely, that funds and other resources be made available, and that our colleges, universities, and think tanks accept this as a major responsibility. *Social Power and Political Freedom* is intended for use as a text in political science courses. If it is widely adopted, it may help awaken the interest that Sharp requests.

How easy it would be to consign Sharp's thesis to the realm of hopeless utopianism were it not for recent events in Poland. There, under domestic totalitarianism and foreign domination, a limited protest by workers has now spread to include many other elements in the society, each with its own demands, yet all supporting the others. The Soviet Union has refrained from invasion, up to now. Why the restraint? Certainly not ethics or morality, which failed to deter them in Afghanistan. Could it be the Soviet Union somehow