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Nicolas Walter
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Nicolas Walter

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there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses or dogs. Yet such as these evert are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others — as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers and office-holders — serve the State chiefly with their heads; and as they serve the Devil, without intending //, as God. A very few — as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men— serve the State with their consciences also and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it.

— HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Last month I examined the background of the unilateralist movement from the point of view of the theories of pacifism and anti-militarism and of the practices of non-violence and direct action, and suggested that the movement is a new pacifism which combines individual responsibility with collective resistance. Rather than recapitulate my argument, I will quote what Alex Comfort said just after the last war about the need for a new pacifism :

> The atomic bomb has brought home to increasing numbers of the public at large that tyranny is not a greater evil than war, because war itself is an instrument of tyranny on the largest scale … Objection is not enough. The objector, particularly the religious objector, is politically irrelevant because he is chiefly interested in safeguarding his own conscientious objection to one aspect of state irresponsibility. You do not want objection, you want resistance, ready to adopt every means short of violence to destroy and render useless the whole mechanism of conscription. It is not enough to secure the immunity and support of religious believers and a politically conscious minority. The opposition of the ordinary man to military service must be canalised. He will not stand up against the machinery of governments and penalties, with the knowledge that his wife and children arc hostages, unless he has the consciousness of that powerful, if invisible, support which the European resistance movements gave to the unpolitical man in his opposition to the Germans. Men will defy conscription in defence of their own lives and homes against military adventurers // they know that there is someone to support them. They will act out of an intuitive

> and thoroughly unpatriotic love of freedom, the sentiment which makes conscription necessary in the first place. The answer to conscription, in England and in every country of the world, is a resistance movement which ask few political credentials of its members … It is by taking the offensive that pacifism will become politically relevant.[1]

This is where we came in. This month I want to examine the background of the unilateralist movement again, this time from the point of view of the theory of insurrection and of the practice of disobedience.

The Theory of Insurrection

Disobedience* against the State is a much older human tradition than direct action against war. Men are authoritarian, obsessed by obedience and inequality and slavery. "No two men can be half an hour together," declared Samuel Johnson, "but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other" — and he will do his best to keep it. But men are also libertarian, obsessed by disobedience and equality and liberty. The myths of Prometheus and Lucifer, of the revolt of the lesser against the greater, are among the oldest of all; Adam's first action (even before he "knew" Eve) was to disobey his creator. Nor is mythological disobedience mere nihilism. Prometheus brought fire to earth, Lucifer brought light — Adam ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and he did not die, as God had threatened, but instead his eyes were opened. The State's motto is Befehl ist Befehl. The individual's motto is Nan serviam. "Wherever there is a man who exercises authority", said Oscar Wilde, "there is a man who resists authority."

[1] Peace & Disobedience (1946), a lecture published by the PPU.

> in the mouth, and the mention of war empties the factories and fills the streets, we may be able to talk about freedom^ The people learn slowly, and learn incompletely. They remain somnambulists, but the pressure of the times moves them. They will be loudly congratulated after the peace, and quietly diddled after that. But they are learning the lesson^ of the war, not unique lessons, but as old as humanity, the lessons of the romantic ideology, of responsibility and disobedience …[14]

Resistance to civil government

> Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powdermonkeys and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now what are they — men at all? or small moveable forts and magazines at the service of some unscrupulous man in power? … The mass of men serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, gaolers, constables, etc. In most cases

[14] "The End of a War" in Art & Social Responsibility (1946), first published in Now.

eyeful of spit … War is a two-headed penny, and the only way to treat it is to sling it back at those who offer it to you … It will be a new just cause next time, and when they begin to say, 'Look, injustice!' you must reply, 'Whom do you want me to kill?' …

You can abolish firing-squads only by refusing to serve in them, by ramming the rifle down the throat of the man who offers it to you if you wish — not by forming a firing-squad to execute all other firing-squads. We worse … Armed revolution can succeed, but armed revolution, being cannot salvage society by obeying it: we cannot defend the bad against the based on power, has never succeeded in producing anything but tyranny …

The maquis of the war may allow themselves to be reabsorbed into the structure of citizenship. We will be the maquis of the peace … Our only weapon is responsibility . Murder and sabotage are not responsible weapons — they are the actions of desperate men or imbeciles. We are desperate men but not imbeciles. We do not refuse to drive on the* left hand side of the road of to subscribe to national health insurance. The sphere of our disobedience is limited to the sphere in which society exceeds its powers and its usefulness …

Up till now, it has been an article of pride among English politicians that the public would shove its head into any old noose they might show it — unflinching, steadfast patriotism, unshakable morale — obedience and direct action. We are going to alter that … When enough people respond to the invitation to die not with a salute but with a smack

The Communist Manifesto (1848) stated that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" — of inequality being maintained by the haves and equality being claimed by the have-nots. But there are two confusing factors . One is that many have-nots accept inequality (here is the fact of "voluntary servitude"), and many haves reject it. Marx and Engels themselves were haves who turned their coats, and the same is true of most radical and revolutionary leaders; neither Prometheus nor Lucifer was a man — one was a Titan and the other was an Angel. The motives of disobedience are complicated; so are its intentions. The other confusing factor is that the revolt against a present inequality usually intends not just to destroy it but to replace it by a future inequality based on a different principle — to expropriate the expropriators — and even without the intention the result is usually the same. Every revolution is 'betrayed', even if it has no Eighteenth Brumaire, simply because power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The Commonwealth of 1649 is followed by the Protectorate of 1653, the Declaration of Rights by the Reign, of Terror—the classless society never comes, the State never withers away. "Revolution is the most authoritarian thing imaginable," said Engels; and Landauer said that every Utopia leads to a new topia. jut as the old topia led to Utopia in the first place. Plus ca change ..

This is why Alex Comfort turned Marx on his head: "The war is not between classes. The war is at root between individuals and barbarian society." (If this is bourgeois idealism, then vive la bourgeoisie !) The war for freedom is the war against society … Revolution is not a single act, it is an unending process based upon individual disobedience." Here we see the distinction made by Max Stirner in The Ego & His Own (1845) between revolution and insurrection; "Revolution aims at new arrangements — insurrection aims not at any new arrangements of ourselves but at arrangements by ourselves." Exactly the same distinction, this time between revolution and rebellion,

is made by Albert Camus in The Rebel (1951): "The claim of rebellion is unity, the claim of revolution is totality … One is creative, the other is nihilist." The revolutionary goal may be liberty and equality, but the revolutionary way leads straight to inequality and slavery. Only insurrection recognises that ends and means are in practice the same, that men can never surrender their responsibility. Revolution uses dissent at one moment, only to enforce rigid assent at the next — revolutionary disobedience today prepares for even sterner revolutionary obedience tomorrow. Revolution overturns the structure of the State; insurrection overthrows it. Insurrection is the libertarian revolution„ undiluted and uninterrupted disobedience, refusing obedience to superiors, without seeking it from inferiors, the Utopia without any topia.

This is the disobedience of the individual against society as well as of the subject against the State, and this individualism lies at the centre of what Alex Comfort, writing in the middle of the last war, called the "ideology of romanticism"[2] — an ideology based on the conviction "that the common enemy of man is death, that the common tie of man is victimhood, and that anyone who in attempting to escape the realisation of that victimhood in himself increases its incidence upon others, is a traitor to humanity and an ally of death." Thus "the romantic has only two basic certainties — the certainty of irresoluble conflict which cannot be won but must be continued, and the certainty that there exists between all human beings who are involved in this conflict an indefeasible responsibility to one another . The romantic has two enemies, death, and the obedient who by conformity to power and irresponsibility ally themselves with death." This means that "the romantic recognises a perpetual struggle upon two levels, the fight against death … and the struggle against those men and institutions who ally

[2] "The Ideology of Romanticism" in Art & Social Responsibility (1946), first published in Now.

has shown as never before that society is the enemy of man — not one economic form of society, capitalist or socialist, but all irresponsible society — and that in peace as in war the only final safeguard of freedom is the ultimate willingness of the individual to disobey …

If I say that it would have been better to have lost the war, and learned thereby to be enemies of society, than to have won it and to be integrated, gleichgeschaltet, those who have been through this agony will understand me. We know that murder is real, atrocities are real, because we have committed them. We know that war is unforgivable because we have forgiven it. In the battle for responsible action we have learned that only the single, isolated, unarmed partisan„ relying on his wits, is able to act responsibly, and if society catches up with him, that is goodnight … The army of decent individuals, the somnambulists of freedom, lose a fighter and close up the gap. It is not only the fascists who destroy people. Society is a machine for doing that very thing …

Barbarian society is rooted today in obedience, conformity, conscription, and the stage has been reached at which, in order to live, you have to be an enemy of society … The choice is not between socialism and fascism but between life and obedience. Every atrocity of the war was the direct consequence of somebody obeying when he should have thought. We have to learn the lesson of resistance, evasion, disappearance, which the occupation taught the! people of France …1 hope so to instruct my sons that they will give the recruiting agent the one reply he merits — a good

We won't have an easy victory, if we have a victory at all, but let's make sure they don't have an easy victory either. As Alex Comfort said, the struggle is "Man against Obedience, Man against Death, If we cannot win the second battle, we can at least win the first." We should remember his words, for his is the true voice of nuclear disarmament, much more than that of Bertrand Russell or anyone else:

> We have one enemy, irresponsible government, against which we are committed to a perpetual and unrelenting maquis. Every government that intends war is as much our enemy as ever the Germans were ... Atrocities are not only the work of sadists ... They are the result of obedience, an obedience which forgets its humanity. We will not accept that obedience. The safeguard of peace is not a vast army but an unreliable public.

I began with a long quotation from Comfort, and I should like to finish with an even longer one. At the end of the last war he wrote its obituary and drew its moral. What he said is as valid and valuable today as it was then, when he was a very young man who kept his head when all about were losing theirs, and I can think of nothing better to say to very young people who are trying to do the same thing eighteen years later:

> This war has not been unique. Its lesson is identical with the lesson of every previous war. The record of it is the record of the incredible, somnambulant heroism of the people of both sides, and the corruption and duplicity of their governments. The outcome of it has been the same outcome as in every previous war — the peoples have lost it ... Yet the war has been unique in one respect. It

themselves with death against humanity, the struggle against barbarism."

The ideology of the new pacifism is precisely this ideology of romanticism, which explains how the new pacifists manage to combine individual responsibility with collective resistance. We are not protozoa, who exist in isolation, nor metazoa, who exist in organic structures, but parazoa- who can pass from one stale to the other, thousands of individuals combining and dividing in response to their environment. The new pacifism rests upon shared personal responsibility. In Politics as a Vocation (1918), Max Weber distinguished between the "ethic of ultimate ends" and the "ethic of responsibility". The ideology of romanticism denies any such distinction and insists that the dilemma is imaginary. We say the way and the goal are one — that "he who would do good to another," as Blake put it, "must do it in minute particulars" —that in the shadow of the Bomb there is nothing more irresponsible than the so-called "responsible" people who make, test and use it, and nothing more responsible than the "irresponsible" people who resist it in the name of ultimate ends. The only responsibility we will accept is

> "a responsibility borne out of a sense of victimhood, of community in a hostile universe, and destined like Prometheus, its central creation, to be the perpetual advocate and defender of man against barbarism, community against irresponsibility, life against homicidal and suicidal obedience.*'

This is typically the responsibility of the artist and the intellectual, not because artists and intellectuals are any more responsible than other people but because the nature of their work repeatedly forces the question of responsibility onto their attention. George Woodcock said during the last war :

> The really independent writer, by the very exercise of his function, 'represents a revolutionary force … Any honest artist is an agitator, an anarchist, an incendiary. By expressing an independent standard of values he attacks the principle of authority, by portraying the truth according to his own vision he attacks the factual manifestations of authority.[3]

Of course few writers are independent, few artists are honest; but the slightest measure of artistic or intellectual independence and honesty must rest on individual responsibility, and individualism in thought, word and deed means disagreement, dissent and disobedience. "No creative activity is free from the sense of protest", says Alex Comfort. "I believe that the poet is necessarily an anarchist," says Herbert Read; "he has two principal duties : to mirror the world as it is, and to imagine the world as it might be." Or in Shelley's famous phrase, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" — not because they have authority but because they deny authority, because they hold children from play and old men from the chimney-corner and speak to them face to face.

A poet here is not just a man who plays with words but a man who creates ideas (poietes is the Greek for "creator"). Think of men who have created ideas in history, even those who were "only" poets in the usual sense. Think of Milton, Shelley and Blake in this country; think of Mayakovsky, Pasternak, and now Yevtushenko in Soviet Russia. And if you ever doubt the power of the written word, think of the Nazis who enslaved Europe but couldn't stop a little Jewish girl writing in her diary; they managed to kill Anne Frank* but as Ernst Schnabel says in The Footsteps of Anne Frank (1958), "Her voice was preserved out of the millions that were silenced, this voice no louder than a child's whisper … and it has outlasted the

[3] "The Writer & Politics" in The Writer & Politics (1948), first published in Now.

can it be otherwise? When liberals (by which I also mean most socialists) complain that the sentences on February 20th were too severe, that the judge was unfair, that the charge was inapplicable, and when they bring out all the familiar civil liberties grievances such as police brutality, they are forgetting that this is what the State is for, what government is about- this is our rulers' job. How else can law and order be maintained? How can anyone pretend that the Welherslield demonstration was not prejudicial to the safety and interests of the State? Of course it was, and so are all demonstrations of even the most pitiful protest against the Bomb. Any man's death diminishes me, and any man's resistance diminishes the State.

We have a difficult struggle with both the Warfare State and the Welfare State— difficult because they overlap so much. For the first we want revolution, and for the second devolution. As Alex Comfort put it, "One is perpetually at sea with Captain Bligh— when he orders the taking in of sail, he is obeyed with perfect discipline; when he orders us to flog a man, not a soul stirs." In our chosen field we must exercise not the right but the duty of disobedience, aggressive and defensive as the circumstances demand; our principles tell us not what to do but how to do it. We must remember that the only good soldier is Schweik, who ends by being taken prisoner by his own side; the only good spy is Our Man in Havana, who gets the OBE for inventing secrets; the only good citizen is K, who is beheaded for nothing more than existing. We may not be beheaded, but even our mild State can use the guillotine seche pretty efficiently. There will be victims; we shall be among them, whether we suffer from punishment or from the shame of giving in. Auden's Unknown Citizen "always held the proper opinions for the time of the year;" we are proud because we don't do that. But "when there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went" — we must try not to do that either.

"inciting" us to do what we were already doing; they give five men 18 months and one woman 12 for breaking the Official Secrets Act in 1962, just as they gave three anarchists nine months under Regulation 39a in 1945, just as they sent Quakers and socialists to prison under Regulation 27c thirty years before that, just as they always bring down the State sledge-hammer on anyone who really challenges military obedience, irrespective of whether the challenge is effective or not. The Wethersfield demonstration last December had no more immediate effect on military obedience than the publication of War Commentary throughout the last war or all the conscientious objection there ever was ___but it became a really effective act of disobedience (and even of direct action) as soon as it was shown to disturb the State so much. The plan to invade the Wethersfield! base began as a tactical error (just like the earlier plans to obstruct the sites at North Pickenham and Harrington) because it was ill-timed and ill- organised; but it became a success after the event, and the tactical error since then has been the decision not to go straight back to Wethersfield but instead back into central London — when we rock the State on its pedestal we should give it another push, not stand back and congratulate ourselves.

"Freedom — is it a crime?" demanded Herbert Read at the time of the Anarchist Trial. Understood by his definition — as "the will to be responsible for one's self" — then of course freedom is a crime, because it replaces the law of man with the law of conscience, principle, decency, inner light, responsibility, God, or what you will. The freedom to take the direct action of a token obstruction of a military base or to commit the civil disobedience of a token assembly in a prohibited place, even while observing the disciplines of non-violence and openness, even while affecting no one, is both a political and a criminal offence. It is impossible to disobey if there is no authority, impossible to resist if there is no power. Of course the State will punish us as savagely as it dares in this gentle island. How

shouts of the murderers and has soared above the voices of time." Who remembers the people who persecuted Milton and Shelley and Blake? Who will remember those who have persecuted Mayakovsky and Pasternak and Yevtushenko? No wonder the acknowledged legislators of the world tremble before the poets, the creators of ideas — no wonder Plato would have driven them from his Republic. They are the yeast in society, the only obstacle to entropy.

Take Yevgeni Zamyatin, the Russian writer whose anti-utopian novel We got him into trouble back in the Twenties, so that he was framed in 1929 and forced to leave the country. In 1925 he said, "Then I was a Bolshevik, now I am not a Bolshevik," and we can see why in an essay he wrote just a few months earlier :

> Revolution is everywhere and in all things; it is infinite, there is no final revolution, no end to the sequence of integers. Social revolution is only one in the infinite sequence of integers. The law of revolution is not a social law, it is immeasurably greater— it is a cosmic, universal law, such as the law of the conservation of energy and the law of the loss ol energy, or entropy ... Red, fiery, death-dealing is the law of revolution; but that death is the birth of a new life, of a new star. And cold, blue as ice, as the icy interplanetary infinities, is the law of entropy. The flame turns trorn a fiery red to an even, warm pink, no longer death-dealing but comfort producing. The sun ages and becomes a planet suitable for highways, shops, bed, prostitutes, prisons— that is a law. And in order to make the planet young again, we must set it on

> fire, we must thrust it off the smooth highway of evolution— that too is a law.[4]

This is simply an imaginative expression of the idea in Landauer's The Revolution (1907), and against it we might put Bart de Ligt's law— The more violence, the less revolution. But Zamyatin was an intellectual —a poet, we may say— and so he is concerned with the intellectual responsibility for resistance to entropy:

> Explosions are not comfortable things. That is why the exploders„ the heretics, are quite rightly annihilated by fire, by axes, and by words. Heretics are harmful to everybody today, to every evolution, to the difficult, slow, useful— so very useful— constructive process of coral reef building. Imprudently and foolishly they leap into today from tomorrow. They are romantics ... It is right and proper that heretical literature, literature that is damaging to dogma, should have its head cut off— such literature is harmful. But harmful literature is more useful than useful literature, because it militates against calcification, sclerosis, encrustation, moss, peace. It is ridiculous and Utopian ... Ideas which feed on mmced meat lose their teeth just as civilised men do. Heretics are necessary to health. It there are no heretics, they have to be invented.

Trotsky was wrong when he said that "all through history, mind limps after reality;" and Gorky was right when he said that "reality always lags behind the human mind." It is the

[4] On Literature, Revolution & Entropy (1924), first published as a reply to Trotsky's Literature & Revolution (1924); reprinted in Partisan Review 3–4 last summer. We has never been published in this country.

hilism — though greatly preferable to violent nihilism — leads to nothing. This is not a myth, it is a mirage. Disobedience must prepare for direct action, Ralph Schoenman (who thought of the Committee of 100 in May, 1960) was right to see that disobedience must come first; but it must lead to effective action.

The fact that unilateralist action so far has been completely ineffective doesn't discourage me nearly as much as the fact that the balance of terror is so delicate, that the Warfare State is so enormously powerful. It isn't us I'm worried about so much as them[13] I take what encouragement I can from Alex Comfort's paradoxical remark that "the very states which are able to make and use atomic weapons are singularly vulnerable by their very complexity to the attacks of individual disobedience," and from Gandhi's similarly paradoxical remark that while "a state may cope with mass civil disobedience, no state has yet been found able to cope with individual civil resistance," I don't expect to see direct action, but I know the only chance is for the practice of disobedience to become a habit. Somehow we must learn to discard what Gandhi called the "fetish of law" and the "fetish of order", to throw off the "voluntary servitude" which keeps the whole thing going, to escape from the "thirst for obedience" described by Freud. There is no other way to replace the "primal horde" of the modern Warfare State. It is not enough to say that something should be done — // you think something should be done, do it yourself.

But my greatest encouragement is that whatever our own doubts about the effects of our resistance, our rulers seem to have none. They drag us about, and throw us into fountains and puddles, and fine us and imprison us; they beat up Adam Roberts in a police station; they try to deport Ralph Schoenman; they give George Clark nine months for

[13] See the Mershon Report (1960), reprinted by Oxford CND; Brown and Real's Community of Fear (1960), published by the American "Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions"; and "Juggernaut: the Warfare State" in the New York Nation (28 October, 1961).

rejecting them altogether. We offer to the State not so much a clenched fist as two fingers— and what is a sit-down on the paving stones of Trafalgar Square or in the mud outside the Wethersfield base, when all is said and done, but a bloody great raspberry in our rulers' faces?

The myth of direct action leading to a general strike against war and against the Warfare State is the right myth for us to have, but it is still only a myth. Of course we must try to make it a reality, but we must also try to recognise the reality of what we are doing. And what we are doing at the moment is disobedience rather than direct action. Unfortunately a subsidiary myth operates here — the myth of the nonviolent attentat, civil disobedience as a stunt or even as an end in itself — and is much reinforced among supporters of the Committee of 100 by the adherence of Bertrand Russell and by the widespread tendency towards random nihilism among young middle -class dissenters. I call this a subsidiary myth because it is only an extreme form of the familiar Fabian myth with radical overtones, the idea of progress by converting the Establishment through persuasion and blackmail. In practice this leads to a policy scarcely different from that of CND, a sit-down in central London becoming a publicity gimmick, like the last day of an Aldermaston march, only more so.

The two dangers of this myth are that it diverts energy away from direct action and eventually back into orthodox political action, and that it leads to the practice of disobedience for the sake of attention and obstruction alone. This is nothing but nihilism. "Who is the rebel?" asked Camus. "The man who says No " but also "the man who says Yes when he begins to think for himself." How many Sitters have begun to think for themselves and have a Yes as well as a No? To sit down in Trafalgar Square as the automatic result of a conditioned reflex or with the intention of blocking as much traffic and filling as much newspaper space as possible is meaningless. All disobedience is meaningless unless it leads to something, and non-violent ni-

single individual trapped in the topia who creates Utopia, and whenever "utopia" is used as a term of abuse we should remember what Oscar Wilde said about it :

> A map of (he world that does not include Utopia is not worth evenglancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there it looks out and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.[5]

The new pacifists arc talking about Jerusalem, they are heretics, Utopians, romantics remember Kingslcy Amis's definition of political romanticism as "an irrational capacity to become inflamed by interests ; and causes that are not one's own, that are outside oneself", in his; Socialism and the Intellectuals (1957). Above all the new pacifists are individualists, for their sort of disobedience can only work upwards against the State and outwards against the servile society from the individual. Several of them can disobey at the same time, but their action remains individual. Direct action that is totally non-violent and altruistic — unattached — remains individual action even if thousands take part. Unilateralist action has always been voluntary and free from external discipline, free sometimes even from organisation. No wonder the new pacifism is a movement of the alienated and discontented middle-class — that the Aldermaston march is a mobile and the Trafalgar Square sit-down a stationary Soviet of Intellectuals, Students and Bohemians — and no wonder that the new pacifists are so much happier with civil disobedience than they are with genuine direct action.

But it would be a mistake to think that they are necessarily ineffectual, just as it would be a mistake to think that someone

[5] The Soul of Man under Socialism (1891), first published in the Fortnightly Review; reprinted by the Porcupine Press in 1948.

like E. M. Forster, for example, is ineffectual. Of course he does seem so la this ruthless age, but his novels are not just word-patterns — they are time-bombs ticking away underneath society, resisting entropy, exploding in one mind after another, saying over and over again: Only connect. Just before the last war he tried to connect what he saw with what he believed. "I do not believe in Belief," he began; "I have, however, to live in an Age of Faith … and I have to keep my end up in it. Where do I start? With personal relationships." And he went on to make his individual but far from ineffectual confession :

> I hate the idea of causes, but if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country … Probably one will not be asked to make such an agonising choice. Still, there lies at the back of every creed something terrible and hard, for which the worshipper may one day be required to suffer, and there is even a terror and hardness in this creed of personal relationships, urbane and mild though it sounds. Love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of a State. When they do — down with the State, say I, which means that the State would down me.[6]

Forster is not an anarchist, though his creed of "personal relationships" is no distance at all from "mutual aid". He expresses support for democracy — "two cheers for democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism" — but also for aristocracy :

not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky … They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos

[6] What I Believe (1939); reprinted in Two Cheers for Democracy (1951).

on token strike against armament production? How many middleclass people have really committed themselves in their private and professional lives, not just in opinion and occasional demonstration? How many decent-minded scientists and technologists and technicians work on defence? How many people realise that we are already involved in the next war before it is declared, just as the Germans were already involved in the Nazi regime before it was established? How many people see that war— all war— is mass murder?

Very few— and direct action is only possible when very many people not only refuse to join but actually leave the growing Doomsday Machine and in the end paralyse it. There are more new pacifists than there were old pacifists, but there are still very few— we march and sit in splendid but rather terrifying isolation. The new pacifism is still after all an overwhelmingly middle-class movement (and the middle-class has no tradition of direct action). It belongs to the tradition of minority dissent rather than to the tradition of majority revolution. It has no class basis in the Marxist sense; we want to be a mass movement, but we aren't within missile distance of one. If Shelley wrote a new Masque^ of Anarchy today, he would have to say : "They are many, ye are few."

We should come to terms with this difficulty instead of trying to pretend it isn't there. "Wishful thinking," as Peter Cadogan says, "has nothing to do with the case." But the myth blinds us. Too many people who support DAC, suffer from a delusion of grandeur, from what might be called the sickness of political onanism— the tendency to swallow one's own propaganda. We haven't got a mass movement, but we want one, so we believe we have got one. We haven't taken direct action, but we want to, so we believe we have taken it. What we have really got is a small but growing movement; what we have really done is to fumble towards direct action. Unilateralist action so far has never been more than a sort of non-violent sabotage. We are still cranks, still defying our political parents instead of

The idea of direct action comes of course from syndicalist doctrine, where it involves a general stay-in strike and decentralised do-it-yourself revolution, as opposed to the more familiar coup d'etat by an elite at the head of a levee en masse. In theory, unilateralist direct action involves an analogous preemptive strike against war and decentralised do-it-yourself disarmament, as opposed in this instance to disarmament carried out constitutionally by a Labour Party converted by the CND pressure group. In practice, however, unilateralist direct action involves nothing of the kind, and is even more mythical than syndicalist direct action. In the Labour Movement minor direct action (strikes, boycotts, go-slows, etc.) may not have led to a general strike but it has led to something. In the unilateralist movement it has led to nothing; in fact none of the "direct action" demonstrations against the Bomb actually qualifies as direct action at all.

Let's face facts. A non-violent blockage by a few devoted cranks of a single entrance to a remote military base, which is tolerated by the authorities for a few hours and then cleared and punished by small fines and prison sentences, cannot even begin to constitute a real threat to the Warfare State — though no doubt it counts 1 as conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline. After all, direct action can only be taken in one's own life and work; it must also be action, as David Wieck said last month, which "realises the end desired"— or at least has a chance of doing so. The so-called "direct action" demonstrations have really been what April Carter calls "symbolic action"[12] and have functioned as a form of propaganda by deed. But they aren't very effective deeds; nor are they very effective propaganda, if by propaganda we mean something more than preaching to the converted and encouraging each other. How many working-class people have left their jobs in or even gone

[12] See April Carter's Direct Action (1962), a pamphlet published by Peace News.

… an invincible army, yet not a victorious one … All words that describe them are false, and all attempts to organise them fail … The Saviour of the future — if he ever comes — will not preach a new Gospel. He will merely utilise my aristocracy, he will make effective the good will and the good temper which are already existing. In other words he will introduce a new technique.

We could guess what the new technique will be, and claim that we are trying to use it ourselves.

Forster has dropped other hints of similarly revolutionary force, drawing attention to "Fa bio-Fascism" in 1935 — "the dictator spirit working quietly away behind the facade of constitutional forms" — and always asserting his obstinate individualism against his collectivist environment. In 1942 he quoted, an imaginary artist: "I know I don't fit in. And it's part of my duty not to fit in." In 1949 he defended "art for art's sake" and also "the bohemian, the outsider, the parasite, the rat" — adding, "I would sooner be a swimming rat than a sinking ship." And in 1951 he said: "Though we cannot expect to love one another, we must learn to put up with one another. Otherwise we shall all of us perish." How much saner this is than Auden's famous cry— and how oddly reminiscent of Lawrence: "People must be together.

Forster has never been a man of action, but his defence oi disobedience is exactly the same as Alex Comfort's, which shows once more the close link between liberalism and anarchism, freedom in theory leading to freedom in practice. What Comfort said on the radio only repeated what Forster had already said, but gave it an edge :

> Responsibility to our fellow men as individuals transcends all other allegiances— to local groups, to nations, to political parties. All these sub-

> sidiary allegiances, which are so numerous, are substitutes for human beings.[7]

There is the liberalism. Now for the anarchism:

> For us as individuals, the only immediate defence against official delinquency lies in our own action. The concentration camps and the atom bombs are the fantasies of psychopaths. They become realities when other individuals are ready to acquiesce in them, to guard them, to make them, and There is no tyranny which is independent of its public. There is no delinquent policy in any contemporary culture which could be carried out m thu face of sufficiently widespread public resistance … There is one revolution we can all produce at once, in the privacy of our own homes. We may not be able to prevent atrocities by other people, but we cart at least decline to commit them ourselves … This revolution is something no party or government is going to do for you. You have to do it yourself, beginning tomorrow.

And this goes straight back to another seemingly ineffectual figure, Henry David Thoreau.

Thoreau was so unpolitical that he preferred to live completely alone, but he had nothing to learn about the realities of politics. He refused to pay his poll-tax to a State which was maintaining slavery and was fighting a war of conquest in Mexico, and he was impnsonea in the Concord town jail for his pains. His reflections on that experience have become a classic text of disobedience :

> It is not a man's duty as a matter of course to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the

[7] The Pattern of the Future (1949); published by Routledge in 1950).

> constructions, whose knowledge is so important, I propose to call myths … Myths are not descriptions of things but expressions of a determination to act … A myth cannot be refuted, since it is at bottom identical with the convictions of a group … The myth must be judged as a method of acting on the present; any attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally as future history is senseless … for there is no process by which the future can be predicted scientifically.[11]

So anything I say which seems uncomplimentary to unilateralist action is meant to be enlightening rather than insulting.

Now the unilateralist movement, as everyone knows, is divided more or less into two main factions, though of course many people work quite happily in both. Its history will be told— if there is time to tell it — not in terms of the shift from Little Englander isolationism to "positive neutralism" or of the particular disarmament plans that have been put forward, but in terms of the deepening conflict between persuasion and resistance, between the techniques of orthodox demonstration and agitation and of unorthodox direct action and civil disobedience. The orthodox faction, which takes a roughly "Fabian" line, is represented by CND, and the unorthodox faction first by DAC and now by the Committee of 100 . The policy of CND has always been that of conventional political action; the policy of DAC and of most supporters of the Committee of 100 has always tended towards direct action. At once we come up against the difficulty that in the unilateralist context "direct action" must be interpreted metaphorically rather than literally, as I suggested last month. It is an expression of a determination to act, not a description of a thing — and moreover it is an imitation of an earlier expression of a determination to act.

[11] Reflections on Violence (1908), first published in the Mouvement Socialists

classless society developing from the dictatorship of the proletariat; the anarchist Utopia is the free society developing from the practice of mutual aid The Christian myth is the Last Judgement; the liberal myth is the parliamentary election based on universal franchise; the socialist myth is the authoritarian revolution based on the proletarian rising; the anarchist myth is the libertarian revolution based on the general strike.

Seen in this light, the pacifist Utopia is world peace developing from universal disarmament and international reconciliation. But the pacifist myth? Until recently there was no real pacifist myth, and this was the fatal defect of pacifism, because although pacifists knew what they wanted the future to be they didn't know how they were going to get there But many of them borrowed the anarchist myth of the general strike, and more particularly the anarchosyndicahst myth of industry direct action. (The relevance of Sorel is heightened by the fact that this was the myth he was most interested in.) Direct action is the dominant myth of the new pacifists.

Here I want to introduce another of Sorel's valuable ideas, that of diremption — the "tearing apart" of a movement or a system by ruthlessly realistic (almost cynical) analysis in order to uncover the facts ^of the case rather than the fiction which disguises them. This was the idea that led James Burnham to call Sorel a Machiavellian; we can only regret that Sorel didn't apply it more rigorously to his own system. But it is a most useful technique ,and I think it should be used on the new pacifism. If anyone objects that we shouldnt rock the boat, my simple answer is that of Thomas Mann: "A harmful truth is always better than a useful lie." But before I examine the unilateralist myth,

I should like to recall what Sorel said about myths in general :

> Men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph. These

> most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him. But it is his duty at least to wash his hands of it, and if he gives it no thought longer not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, 1 must first see at least that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders ... What I have done is to see at any rate that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.[8]

Yes says the conventional dissenter, the liberal— the socialist?— but why break the law instead of trying to change it in the usual way? Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavour to amend them and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? ... Under a government which imprisons any unjustly the true place for a just man is also a prison ... As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something.

Thoreau wasn't an anarchist either. Although he agreed with Jefferson's motto "That government is best which governs least" and with its corollary "That government is best which governs not at all", he added : "But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for not at once no government but at once a better government." Nevertheless we can see that the implications of his action and of his essay are purely anarchist, and we can

[8] Resistance to Civil Government (1848), a lecture first published in Aesthetic Papers (1849); frequently reprinted as Civil Disobedience or The Duty of Civil Disobedience.

share his thoroughly anarchic attitude to his self-righteous law-abiding fellow-citizens :

> I think we should be men first, and subjects afterwards ... I quarrel not with far-off foes, but with those who near at home co-operate with and do the bidding of those far away and without whom the latter would be harmless ... There are thousands who are in opinion opposed to slavery and to the war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them ... They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition, but they do nothing in earnest and with effect. They will wait, well disposed, for others to remedy the evil, that they may no longer have it to regret. At most, they give only a cheap vote and a feeble countenance and god-speed to the right as it goes by them. There are 999 patrons of virtue to one virtuous man , .. Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail ... How can a man be satisfied to entertain an opinion merely, and enjoy it? ... Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.

And anyone who has spent even just a few hours in jail after unilateralist demonstrations will recognise Thoreau's reaction to his night inside in the summer of 1845 :

> I saw that if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could

stead of killing and dying to create what we are not, we must live and let live to create what we are." It is time to accept the categorical imperatives of Kant : "Act only according to a law which you would like to be universal .. , Treat every human being as an end, not a means." Or the analogous imperatives of Alex Comfort : "I am responsible for seeing that I do nothing which harms any other human being and I leave nothing undone which can reduce the amount of preventable suffering and failure ... When you are asked to choose between a personal action which causes suffering and a hypothetical evil which will result if you refuse, choose the hypothetica evil"[10] Or quite briefly what Camus said in The Plague (1947). 1 know that in this world there are plagues and there are vict .ims and _it is up to us not to ally ourselves with the plagues." Of all the plagues in the world, organised mass violence-war-has been the worst and will, unless we move quickly, be the last.

It is important to understand what has happened in the unilateralist movement, where disobedience to the Warfare State is most effective way and to do so I think we need the help of Sorel. It may seem odd to go to such a man for lessons about non-violent resistance, but that is only because he is better known for his praise of violence than for his other, more valuable, ideas. One of the most valuable is that of the myth, and one of the most important lessons we must learn is the place of the myth in our ideology. Every active ideology decided on a Utopia and a myth, one vision of what the future will be and another of how to get there. The Utopia is static, the myth is dynamic. Adler said "man is a teleological animal", and his telos or goal is not so much the ultimate Utopia as the immediate myth-a sort of condenser into which we feed our energy and from which we take our energy back when we need it. The Christian Utopia is the Kingdom of Heaven, the liberal Utopia is parliamentary democracy; the socialist Utopia is the

[10] The Right Thing to Do (1948), a lecture published by the PPU.

infantile, but it is worse to become adult; we should grow up ,but we should never stop growing, questioning, agitating, disobeying. Perhaps we are one-eyed, but we are living in the Country of the Blind. Perhaps we are neurotics who keep on disobeying our political parents (or at least we behave as if we were). But our political parents are psychotics, psychopaths Jiving in a world of fantasy (or at least they behave as if they were). Their games of 'chicken"are far more delinquent[9] than anything we -could think of, and far more dangerous, which is the important point. They are professional pyromaniacs when we are just amateur incendiaries — they destroy people when we just disturb them. And they will destroy us too if we don't disturb enough sane people first. Which madness do you prefer — theirs or ours? Which situation do you choose — Montagues and Capulets, or Romeo and Juliet?

The way things are going, we're already dead; but we won't lie down. We are living in a world where faith is always misplaced and hope is always betrayed, and somehow we contrive to keep faith and hope alive; we try to keep charity alive too, though it is difficult. We are puritans, not those who have a sense of sin and shame, but those who have one of conscience and responsibility— who have what E. M. Forster at the Lady Chatterley Trial called "this passionate opinion of the world and what it ought to be, but is not."

The Practice of Disobedience

Our youthful disobedience against the Warfare State must be nonviolent, for devils cannot cast out devils, and violent resistance to war is more likely to spread than to stop it. Violence in human history has brought us to the concentration camps and the Bomb. It is time to call a halt, to listen to Camus : "In-

[9] See Alex Comforts Authority & Delinquency in the Modern State (1950).

> get to be as free as me ... I saw that the State was half-witted, that it was as timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it ... I saw more distinctly the State in which I lived. I saw to what extent the people among whom I lived could be trusted as good neighbors and friends — that their friendship was for summer weather only, that they did not greatly propose to do right ... I think sometimes, Why, this people mean well, they are only ignorant, they would do better if they knew how — why give! your neighbors this pain to treat you as they are not inclined to?' But I think again, 'This is no reason why I should do as they do, or permit others to suffer much greater pain of a different kind.'

It is easy to think of his disobedience as primarily inner-directed, as a form of conscientious objection; but he certainly thought of it as other-directed, as a form of propaganda by deed. Remember that he read his lecture to the very fellow citizens he was scornful about, and that he originally called it Resistance to Civil Government rather than Civil Disobedience. He hoped to improve society, but he happened to be a transcendentalist and an individualist first and a man of action afterwards. Even so, he remarked that "any man more right than his neighbor^ constitutes a majority of one," and he declared that "if one honest man in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this co-partnership and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America." And he was one of the few people who spoke out for John Brown when he withdrew from the co-partnership and defied the State of Virginia at Harper's Ferry in October 1859, and was hanged therefor

—John Brown whose body lies a-mouldering in the grave, but whose soul went marching on, and the abolition of slavery in America came in less than three years.

Individual disobedience, which is the result of individual disagreement and dissent, is not in itself a cause of change, but it can be a most potent catalyst precipitating change. The romantic defiance of death and decay cannot prolong life or youth or love, but it can give them meaning. Non-violent insurrection may not topple the Warfare State, but it will certainly shake it and it will also give meaning to the life and youth and love of the insurgents. Disobedience is not calculable or predictable; and when Shelley or Blake, or Thoreau or Tolstoy, or Forster or Russell, or other people with sharp pens disobey or justify disobedience, or both, who is to say how far it will spread? "I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually," says Thoreau; "In fact I quietly declare war on the State after my fashion." "I only know that on the one hand the State is no longed necessary for me," says Tolstoy, "and that on the other I can no longer do the things that are necessary for the State." "We must stand aside," says Lawrence. "There is no such thing as the State," says Auden, "and no one exists alone." "We appeal to the conscience of man," says Russell; "We seek to persuade them by our example. We disobey because in all conscience we have no choice but to disobey." "I give you disobedience as the last standard for the human being of today," says Alex Comfort on the BBC. "Damn you England," says John Osborne in his modern home thoughts from abroad—and "we are not alone." No indeed, for these are the cries of the heretics, the incendiaries and the agitators down the centuries. Remember what Oscar Wilde said about agitators :

> No class is ever really conscious of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and they often entirely disbelieve them ... Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without Ihcm, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilisation.

Anyone who upsets people is an agitator, anyone who disturbs the equilibrium, who opposes entropy with energy— "energy is the only life," said Blake, and agitators conduct energy from the quick to the dead. Agitators are not just pamphleteers or speakers at street-corners and factory-gates, not just John Ball and John Lilburne and Tom Paine and William Morris — but all poets, all creators of new ideas, all observers of the world and prophets of the world to come. Simply to describe an evil is to agitate against it. Of course many agitators are not conscious of their activity, but all of them consciously or unconsciously sow the seed of discontent and disagreement, which grows into the plant of dissent, whose fruit is disobedience. The seed may fall on stony ground, it may be choked or uprooted, but some will always grow. You can't fool all of the people all of the time.

The new pacifists are agitators who will not stop growing up. T. S. Eliot once said with distaste : "The ideas of Shelley seem to me always to be the ideas of adolescence." He was quite right. Kingsley Martin has called the extreme unilateralists "infantile leftists". He too is quite right (though we are adolescent rather than infantile — children do what they are told in the end). The romantic view of life and death is the adolescent view. The sense of personal responsibility for good and evil is the adolescent sense. The taste for Shelley and Beethoven rather than Pope and Bach is the adolescent taste. It is adolescents who make mistakes, adults who avoid them — but the person who doesn't make mistakes doesn't make anything. It is bad to be