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Erratum
Issue 1

BOOK REVIEW

GERMANY AND THE EAST-WEST CRISIS: THE DECISIVE CHALLENGE TO AMERICAN POLICY. By William S. Schlamm. New York: David McKay Co., 1959. Pp. 237. \$3.95.

One is tempted to reply to this book, rather than review it. This is high level polemics with all the virtues and all the faults of that mode of discourse: Passionate in utterance, Schlamm engages the reader and forces him to re-examine many of the shibboleths which have become the inadvertently petrified substitutes for responsible thought, he attacks all or many of the sacred cows in the armory of Western strategy and tactics, and subjects the cultural and spiritual condition of the West in general, and of Germany in particular, to the raking crossfire of his frequently acute insights and invariably immoderate *dicta*. So far so good. But for these advantages Schlamm pays the high price of all polemicists: slipshod handling of facts, an ungovernable eagerness to ride his thesis to death, shocking irresponsibility in confronting intellectual or logical obstacles that stand in the way of his pet thesis, and an evidently irresistible weakness for provocative sensationalism.

The thesis runs something like this: The task of the West is to roll back the Soviet empire. To accomplish this, we must abandon our defensive posture and must begin to operate on the concept of offensive. As Germany is the key to Europe and, hence, to world domination, our offensive must originate in Germany and can succeed only with the help of Germany which, Schlamm thinks, is worth "several Indias, with several Yugoslavias and several Polands thrown in." For this purpose the United States should form a separate alliance with the Bonn Republic (thus scuttling the present NATO structure which is useless for Schlamm's purposes) and make a separate Peace Treaty with her (the Potsdam Agreement is dead anyway). This treaty would not only establish that Bonn is the only rightful heir to the former *Reich*, but would "articulate the basic claims of Germany, the United States, and the entire West against the Soviet Union: that Soviet troops must cease the illegal occupation of the eastern parts of sovereign Germany." We would thus be in a position to "tell the Soviets, and with a show of force, that a continued Soviet occupation is a violation not only of German sovereignty but also of international law—an inimical act against the United States." But talk is cheap: "Allied by close agreement, Germany and the United States will massage the nerves and feed the apprehensions of the Soviets with a sometimes inscrutable, sometimes coldly forceful, always imaginative policy of incessant pressures and incessantly increasing urgency." That is, "the United States and Germany would calmly proceed with a war of nerves that, indeed, includes the risks of real war."

But Schlamm does not admit that World War III would become inevitable by this harmonious marriage of Dullesian "brinkmanship" and German

Schrecklichkeit" for "the Soviets are deathly afraid of an all-out conflagration, are profoundly disturbed by the mere prospect of a serious armed conflict." This in fact, argues Schlamm, is precisely Russia's Achilles heel. Because they are afraid of war and we won't be, we'll be able to scare them into withdrawing from stolen territory. Of course, there is always the possibility that something may go wrong—even with the most thoughtfully prepared policy: "in this case we shall have to fight."

Schlamm is not greatly troubled by that prospect. In the first place, it will be a "war they must lose," presumably because good always conquers evil. At any rate, no evidence whatever is presented for this highly reassuring bit of prophecy. But one may legitimately question Schlamm's credentials as an oracle in the light, for instance, of his "admission" that ". . . the Soviet Union may match, *someday*, the West's atomic potentials. . . ." (Emphasis added by reviewer.) And this while the Russians are planting the hammer and sickle on the moon and are photographing its hidden face! Secondly, Schlamm is no lily-livered pacifist, for pacifism, as he never tires of pointing out, is "an infantile disease of the intellect." Schlamm's is a muscular absolutist orthodoxy: "To resist evil, in spite of what such resistance means in quantitative terms of human suffering, is either right or it is wrong. If it is right, then I shall resist evil whether such resistance results in physical terror for "only" 100 million people or whether 200 million people will be maimed." It's as simple as that. But the "argument" becomes even more incredible: "As pain and suffering exist only in the experience of the creature that goes through pain and suffering, the sum total of *all* conceivable pain and suffering is all the pain and suffering *one* human creature can experience. There is no more."

Schlamm in headlong pursuit of his quarry is not easy to slow down. No quarter is given to the corroding promptings of a human heart, nor indeed to the decadent cowardice of a Western society which in years of subversion has been hollowed out by liberals, socialists, welfare-statists, and *Kultur*-nihilists. Communism is the absolute evil which will get us unless we get it first, and that "as surely as the laws of logic remain in control of observed reality." In the light of this apodictic "fact," there is not much point in asking what might happen to our liberal democratic institutions under conditions of permanent and unrelieved crisis. The need to stamp out absolute evil in this world apparently also removed from the author the responsibility for analyzing possible changes in recent Soviet policy, the nature and form of Soviet expansion and empire; for investigating the role of China and Chinese-Russian relations, for determining Khrushchev's internal position *vis-à-vis* the remnants of the "right-wing" "anti-party" group, or for determining the bases of Anglo-American and Franco-American relations. Nor is there any point in asking why we must embark on the suicidal mission to *force* the Soviets to retreat. Schlamm is not given to half measures: ". . . there is no alternative to this strategic commitment [to make the Soviets retreat] unless we are willing to yield."

The rewarding thing about this book, however, is that carelessness is paired with sharp observation, irresponsibility with acute understanding. To be sure, the observations and understanding are filtered through a mind which has its intellectual home in the vicinity of William F. Buckley, Jr., Senator Goldwater, General Wedemeyer and Dean Clarence Manion. But the arguments presented and values displayed by Schlamm, though quite familiar to the student of modern conservatism here and abroad, are still novel enough to a large sector of the American reading public to make them worth noting.

On the nature of communism, Schlamm says that "to recognize communism as the final phase of scientism, rather than a special system of social power, is crucial." This leads, naturally to the sequel: "It becomes clear . . . why the humanly decent liberal of our time . . . is so pathetically disarmed by communism . . . It is this heretical readiness of modern man to put his trust in science that constitutes the persuasiveness of the power of communism. . . . No matter how profoundly the upright liberal and the decent socialist deny that the end justifies the means—they all, in their hearts, do believe in the same ends: that man will remake creation, that science will redeem man. The Promethean heresy has formed them all; and the popular front is the logical outgrowth of this common heritage." To be sure, the upright liberal and the decent socialist will try to escape the communist embrace. All in vain: "In the end, communism will get them; for communism is the only potent and the only legitimate administrator of the heretical heritage of centuries." This is, of course, only a variation on the old, but never trite, conservative theme that the victory of political humanism over the Christian conception of life was the fatal event that opened the way to the totalitarian state. Humanism ushered in an age of invention, of science and the machine. Technology destroyed the previous organic development and replaced it with organization. Man was turned from a subject into an object. Humanism had dethroned God and erected as idol the machine. With the death of God, technical civilization was bound to become totalitarian. Fascism, communism and liberalism are after all merely variants of the same political humanism, and, hence, brothers under the skin. *Q.e.d.*

It is in the nature of the book's structure that in a review of its main thesis one is likely to forget to mention its first 150 pages which deal with a frequently acute analysis of Germany's present economic, spiritual, and cultural life. This long discourse is hardly integrated with the second part of the work in which the main thesis is stated. On the contrary, Schlamm's description of the fatuity of Germany's sated philistinism, of the German's spiritual sickness and nihilism raises two questions in the reader's mind: One, whether it is worth saving a society so decadent and, two, whether such a society can contribute anything to the kind of visceral *Realpolitik* which Schlamm advocates. In fact, these questions seemed to have bothered Schlamm too, for he sees the American-German offensive as a kind of therapy which would banish

the sense of anomie, purposelessness and intellectual nihilism which has been part of Germany's inheritance from the West.

In the course of his observations on Germany, Schlamm has some penetrating things to say: He shows up the Allied policies of unconditional surrender, collective guilt, denazification-by-questionnaire, for what they were—first rate blunders. Some may find fault with his strictures on the Nuremberg trials, but hardly any one would want to quarrel with his description of the effect of the trials on the German conscience. Schlamm's identification of Adenauer's peculiar strength as symbol of bourgeois solidity is certainly largely correct, even if one cannot share his well-nigh unlimited confidence in this man. The analysis of German political and moral apathy, the overwhelming pragmatism in the make-up of the new German, the absence of nationalism in German cultural life and the disconcertingly low level of mass entertainments and popular literature—it all makes profitable reading.

Unfortunately, here too the reader is not spared annoying intrusions of Schlamm's massive prejudices and sensational hyperboles. His vituperation is monumental and its victims are many: Social planners, democratic socialists, the alleged secret communist dupes and "adherents of economic determinism" on the staff of the U.S. Army of Occupation (one gathers, mostly German Jewish refugees), the Federal Council of Christian Churches (which has "succeeded in dispersing American Protestantism as an army available for the war against the communist antichrist"), the liberal democratic press of Germany, and the "leftist" press in the United States (like, for instance, the *New York Times*), the chief grave diggers of the West, Eisenhower, Kennan and Lippmann; such disease carriers of cultural nihilism as "the Picassos and Sartres, the Faulkners and Millers, the Osbornes and Tynans," and above all the atomic scientists whose troubled conscience has led them to political action (their efforts on behalf of sanity are characterized as "the epileptic dances of the natural scientists") and the "neutralists" and pacifists wherever they may be. Schlamm's passionate aversions, however, trick him into many errors of emphasis and of interpretation which a more moderate man might well have avoided.

In conclusion, mention might be made of the crowning irony of the book—although it is a biographical one and not intrinsic to Schlamm's argument. In the introduction the author tells us that he had been, in the early 30ies, a collaborator of Karl von Ossietzky and later even (after von Ossietzky's arrest by the Nazis) his successor as editor of the renowned *Weltbühne*. It should be remembered that von Ossietzky, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1936, went to his martyrdom in Hitler's concentration camps because of his liberalism and pacifism. Hater of war and all things military, von Ossietzky had come to direct the scathing and brilliant polemics of the *Weltbühne* primarily against the conservative rightist parties and their followers in the army who played hand-in-glove with the Nazis. It is ironic—and yet, at the same time most

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revealing—that Schlamm, whose most passionate and extravagant attacks are directed against pacifism, socialism and communism, apparently had once stood in that camp himself.

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