

seriously by a loss of faith in government effort itself.

A lot of people never believed in such efforts in the first place, of course. They're saying New York has too many luxuries—like free college, and special schools for children who are deaf or blind. They don't like all those we-can-do-better programs and would like to make sure that the baby will be thrown out with the bath. At the moment public feeling—as disgusted as it is badly-informed—is probably on the side of the skeptics. There has been an unseemly scramble for New York's money in the last ten years, and the poor have no doubt been in there elbowing with the rest, but something more than spleen ought to go into a rollback of city programs.

By now two things have become clear. One is that the budget shell-game is up. The other is that a lot of

city money is being wasted. The question is, which part? The part which goes to retire bus dispatchers after 20 years, or the part which pays tuition at City College? So far the press has focused on the drama of default: Can the city borrow \$400 million in time to pay Friday's bills, or will it go under and leave the courts to decide who gets paid? The larger question of what the money is for has been neglected. I can understand why reporters hesitate to take it on; one shrinks from entering the municipal swamp, with its fevers and quicksand. But eventually someone is going to decide what New York can afford, the clerk armies, or the services which really are vital, and if the press and the public don't do it, the accountants will.

THOMAS POWERS

BOOKS

INNOCENCE IN AMERICAN POLITICS

ROBERT K. LANDERS

Dear America

KARL HESS

Morrow, \$7.95

The Defeat of America: Presidential Power and the National Character

HENRY STEELE COMMAGER

Simon and Schuster, \$7.95

The transformation of Karl Hess from rightist zealot into leftist romantic seems to have begun nearly a decade ago when, not long after the rout of his then-hero, Senator Goldwater, he mounted his new motorcycle and, under, as he assures us, the disapproving gazes of his neighbors, friends and wife, zoomed off "toward that most heretical of questions that can be asked in the middle class, the question of whether one should do things because of the way they feel rather than the way they look."

Prior to this encounter with advanced heresy, Hess would like now to believe, he regulated his conduct according to his estimate of its appearance, "without really caring very much and without thinking very much—a regular Organization Man. But,

even as he thus inadvertently reveals the poseur within, he manages to avoid noticing just how exotic a wearer of the Gray Flannel Suit he was; at one point, for example, he gathered into his garage semiautomatic rifles and barrels full of the chemical base for napalm, for shipment to the forces of some aspiring Cuban liberator; presumably on the excuse that, as he once wrote, "It would not be America really if it did not produce men who suddenly tire of palaver and reach for the rifle on the wall, to use themselves or to hand to the underdog who needs it."*

But that, of course, was before his motorcycle ride. Now he does things because they feel good, as when he decided to refuse to pay his federal taxes simply "because I got mad" at the hounds of the IRS; and now he daydreams, not of the rifle on the wall, but of the disappearance of big business, as well as big government, and their replacement by consensual communities of "good neighbors and hard workers," all over this land. Although this happy condition is inexplicably not yet, there is emerging, he reports,

* Cited by Murray Kempton in "Karl Hess: Goldwater Finds His Sorensen," *The New Republic*, August 8, 1964.

"a new alliance in political life" of those who have seen the light, and this new alliance is "moving in a new direction," etcetera.

No virtue is more frequently invoked by Hess, and in none does he seem more deficient, than that of common sense. "Politics," he writes, "is the way you live your life." Believing thus, it is no wonder that he embraces so zealously his meretricious simplicities and shields them so completely from his own scrutiny; without them, he must fear, he would almost cease to be, or, at least, would have to undertake another Great Lurch Forward. It is no wonder, either, that he can write, of his current, and of his former, comrades: "I do not personally know an active, persistent person on the left who is in for the money, the glory, or the personal power. On the right I knew scarcely anyone who was not."

Hess, even Hess transformed, it becomes clear, is an innocent; no less an innocent, in his way, than Alden Pyle, Graham Greene's *Quiet American*, in his. In this respect, of course, Hess is scarcely alone; indeed, as Henry Steele Commager reminds us, we, as a nation, have been convinced of our

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innocence and moral superiority from the beginning; and we stubbornly have retained that conviction, despite all the evidence to the contrary which history has so generously adduced.

"Because now, as in the past, we are confident that we represent freedom, law, order, justice and the wave of the future," Commager writes, in a penetrating essay which deepens one's understanding of the historical roots of our delusion, "we feel justified in pursuing policies of intervention, subversion and aggression which we have always judged to be reprehensible in others."

Has this now changed? Dare one hope that our tragic misadventure in Vietnam—"innocently" begun; cynically

If every lesson I have learned in a long political life had to be distilled into a single one, it would be that when the people generally permit positions of power to exist, the people generally and in the long run, suffer and become subjects. . . . Life, love, work, and creativity have historically been sacrificed to the demands of power. For loving, working, and creative people to throw off the yoke of power it is necessary to abolish power itself, not merely make the yoke comfortable.—Dear America

We have long known that 'power corrupts'; but we do not think that power corrupts us or can ever corrupt us, because we always wield it for the benefit of mankind. Only a people infatuated with their own moral virtue, their own superiority, their own exemption from the ordinary laws of history and of morality, could so uncritically embrace a double standard of morality as have the American people. Only a people whose traditions of isolation have made them immune to world opinion could be surprised that they have forfeited the respect of much of mankind by their misuse of power throughout the globe.

—The Defeat of America

and criminally prolonged—has led us at last to begin to grasp that we are not a vessel of true innocence? Perhaps; but if so, the immediate cause, one judges, will be less Vietnam, for which we undoubtedly would have elaborated ingenious explanations to enable us to preserve our exalted conception of our own virtue, than Watergate, which obliged us, if we were to preserve our precious constitutional heritage, to see ourselves, finally, as others saw us.

"It was the Cold War, the transfer of that war from the foreign to the domestic arena and then the war in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia," Commager discerns, "that led inexorably to the follies, illegalities and immoralities of the Nixon administration." It is the great merit of Commager's essays and statements here collected—most of which, incisive and admirable as they are, may seem now, taken individually, too familiar, as their polemical moments were ticked off only recently—that, when taken together, they make this ghastly sequence vividly apparent and recall to mind Greene's haunting simile: "Innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm."

A History of Judaism

Volume One: From Abraham to Maimonides

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

Volume Two: Europe and the New World

BERNARD MARTIN

Basic Books, \$37

DAVID STERN

While the past decade has witnessed the coming-of-age of Judaic studies in the American academic establishment, the crucial question of its subject's identity has still not been resolved: is Judaism a people, civilization, religion, or idea? Not a small irony of Jewish history itself is the fact that, at one time or another, a convincing argument has been made for each definition's claims,

but the truth is that Jewish history has contained all these aspects, and more.

As its title suggests, *A History of Judaism* focuses on the spiritual odyssey of the Jewish people and is predicated upon its two authors' conviction that "despite all the changes, there has been no age which has not listened reverently to the divine voice of Sinai, no generation without a gripping tension between the word of God and the palpable realities of the present day." This history is intended primarily for a popular audience and neither promises new ideas nor offers any. What it does provide is a competent and clear account of the major trends of Jewish intellectual history as they have consistently centered upon the development of one major theme: the *halacha*, the corpus of Jewish law. While Silver and Martin do not accept the notion that Judaism or the *halacha* has ever existed as a monolithic, unchanging system, they are able to demonstrate both the different forces which contributed to its formation and the various ways in which Jewish thought subsequent to its crystallization has inevitably revolved about it, in interpretation as well as in protest.

Like any intellectual history, this one suffers to a certain extent from the problem of divorcing idea from the matrix of history. Still, Silver and Martin fare passably well, even if their work as a whole possesses something of a split personality. Although both men collaborated in its planning, Silver wrote the first volume, which extends from the pre-Biblical origins of Israel to the medieval splendor of the Spanish Golden Age, while Martin composed the second volume, which brings the history of Judaism down to its most recent developments following the Yom Kippur War. One only wishes that the two men had collaborated more closely in writing their separate volumes.

Silver's volume is, I think, the more successful one, largely because he is acutely sensitive to the paradoxes which informed the emergence of the Jewish religion and its formation in the *halacha*, and is able to convey them to his audience without diminishing their inherent contradictions. While he under-

CORRESPONDENCE



A Liberal Wallace?

Milwaukee, Wisc.

To the Editors: Sisyphus' comments about the need for a "liberal George Wallace" in your July 18, 1975 issue was an unexpected piece of horse sense in the liberal Catholic press. I do not think it will touch off a spate of "blue collar chic" among liberals since that would offend the elitism which makes liberalism fun.

The reluctance of standard liberals to pay attention to and reassess the mood and constructive efforts of urban working-class neighborhoods is leaving them behind in the realistic search for honest solutions to urban problems. Not very many large and middle-sized cities are without their home-grown community organization which has seized issues which most politicians will not touch: redlining, failure of urban education, street crime, deceptive marketing practices, urban planning mistakes, property tax absurdities, etc. Yet much of the liberal press ignores these efforts or minimizes their importance. As the Assistant News Director of a large television station said to one group here, "What does a bunch of priests and housewives know about the city . . . ?"

Ralph Nader recently charged that the news media generally ignores the political activities of neighborhood people: housewives, the retired, clergymen, The fascination of the press with every trifling comment from City Hall or Washington has blinded it to a genuine revolution happening in its midst. The liberal George Wallace which Sisyphus calls for is happening, not in the person of one man or woman, but corporately in the coalitions of white, ethnic, and black organizations. The functional integration of people working on the same problems is twenty times more valuable than the abstraction of integration pursued in the editorial columns of liberal newspapers or in liberal legislation.

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CANDIDATE FORD

The presidential race is more than a year away, but President Ford is already off and running hard, and apparently not even an assassination attempt is going to be allowed to cut down on his campaigning. Mr. Ford may shift ground as he goes along, but so far his basic theme is clear: the assertion that the federal government's role is primarily in the area of national defense and that its part should be minimized or eliminated in all others. As he pledged to an audience of hardware merchants in the midwest, his aim is to "get the federal government out of your business, out of your lives, out of your pockets and out of your hair." If such statements simply meant a desire to cut excessive bureaucratic interference, no one could reasonably object. But as speech after speech makes plain, Mr. Ford hankers after the pre-New Deal days when any substantial governmental role in economic life was rejected out of hand. It is hard to believe in this day and age, but Mr. Ford seems committed to seek a full four-year term on a tired old platform of *laissez faire*. With the nation perhaps just beginning to emerge from a serious recession and with unemployment still at a distressingly high rate, it seems an incredible game plan, but Mr. Ford has sounded the same note over and over again. Why he is doing it, though, is the question. Mr. Ford can bring the hardware merchants to their feet whistling and applauding with a promise to "cut big government down to size," but those out of work and those worried about their jobs far outnumber the hardware sellers, and they are unlikely to vote for a do-nothing President. Why then is Gerald Ford taking the line he is?

Some argue that Mr. Ford is following the conservative road in order to undercut Ronald Reagan's appeal to GOP conservatives. Once he gets the nomination locked up, this thesis goes, the President will moderate his Adam Smith line and make an appeal to voters outside the Republican party's right wing. This seems to be the analysis of the moderate Republican Senators who warned Mr. Ford that the conservative tone of his recent utterances could win him his party's nomination but cost him the electoral votes of