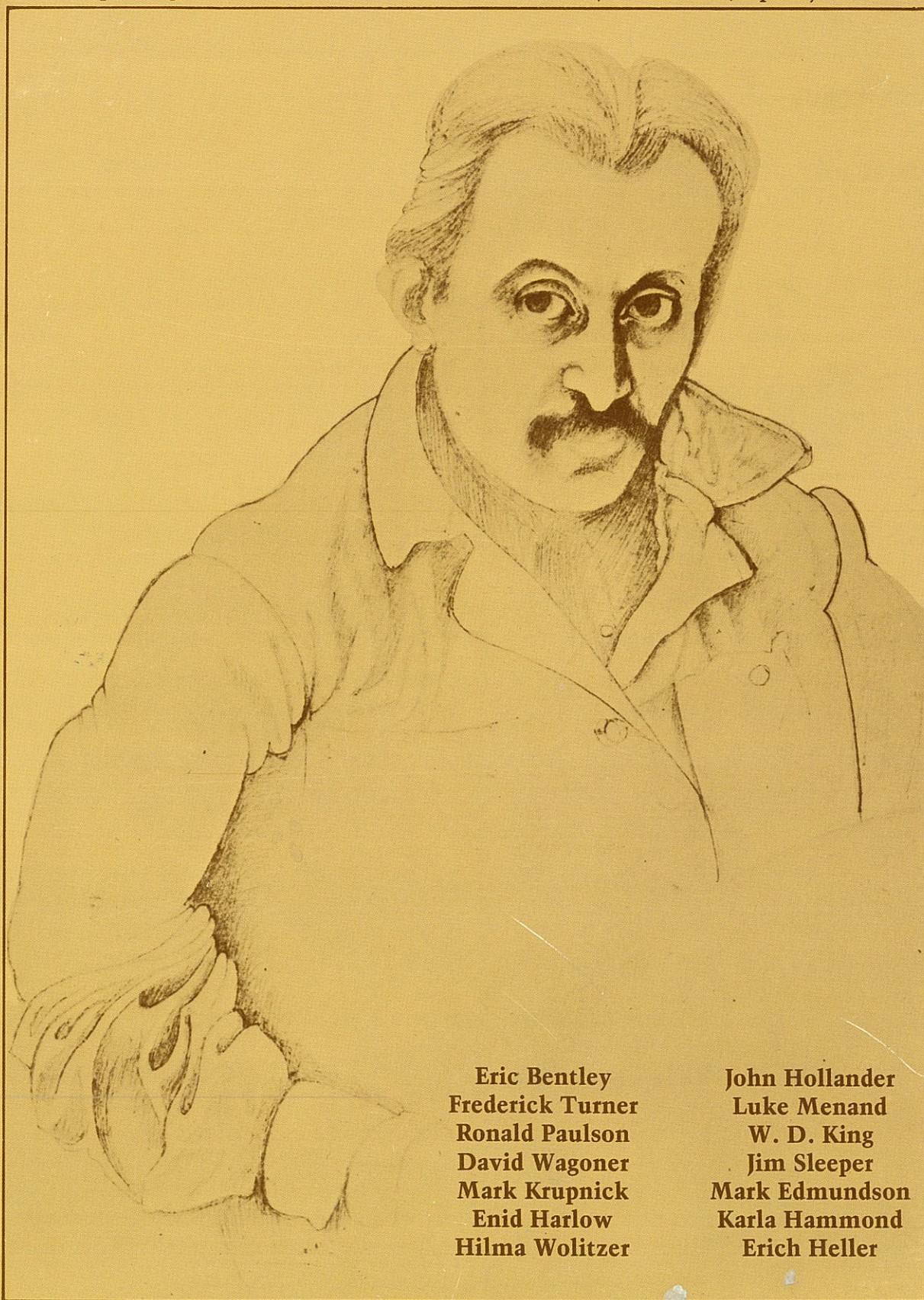


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- | | | | |
|-----------|----|---|---|
| art | 2 | Dreams, Films, Photographs
W. D. King | |
| fiction | 14 | Kit Marlowe's Testament, or The Tragedy of Moses, King of the Jews, by Christopher Marlowe, 1597
Frederick Turner | 1 |
| criticism | 23 | Art and Politics Once More
Mark Krupnick | |
| poetry | 27 | In the Gallery
Public Landmarks
John Hollander | |
| criticism | 28 | Edmund Wilson: The Last American Scholar?
Mark Edmundson | |
| fiction | 33 | Sorrowing Sycamores
Enid Harlow | |
| theater | 37 | The Voice of America and the Voice of Eric Bentley
Eric Bentley | |
| poetry | 43 | The Naval Trainees Learn How to Jump Overboard
Octopus
Elegy for Twenty-four Shelves of Books
Sleeping Beauty
David Wagoner | |
| interview | 47 | An Interview with Hilma Wolitzer
Karla Hammond | |
| film | 58 | Methods and Madnesses
Luke Menand | |
| criticism | 66 | The Poet in the Age of Prose: Reflections on Hegel's "Aesthetics" and Rilke's "Duino Elegies"
Erich Heller | |

columns

- | | | |
|-----------|----|--|
| arguments | 74 | Timerman and the Case for a New Politics
Jim Sleeper |
| letter | 80 | |
| art | 81 | Arshile Gorky and Philip Guston
Ronald Paulson |

arguments

74 Timerman and the Case for a New Politics

by Jim Sleeper

I

Only a year ago, regular *Commentary* contributor Ruth Wisse attacked prominent American Jewish critics of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians with a bitter little parable by I. L. Peretz purporting to show that "prudence" in the face of anti-Semitism only deepens its virulence. The liberal Americans' tendency to blame Third World hostility toward Israel on Menachem Begin's noted lack of prudence infuriated Wisse, because it reminded her of the Rabbi of Chelm's warnings to the frequently beaten Yankele that he was the cause of his own misfortunes at the hands of the goyim.

After all, the *Chelmer rebbe* noted, Yankele tended to flash his lovely set of teeth when he smiled, and generally to go about his business in a forthright, open man-

ner; why should he be surprised if his non-Jewish neighbors felt provoked to smash him in the mouth?

No matter that Begin, unlike Yankele, is a head of state whose "business" happens to affect millions of people, *Commentary* stood defiantly by the parable's essential truth, which is that Jews should quit worrying about whatever it is *they* do to cause anti-Semitism, since they are really no worse than other people. Ben Gurion used to say that Zionism is really a quest for normalcy, for the right to have Jewish prostitutes in Jewish jails, a Jewish flag flying over a Jewish army; Jews should stop negotiating their right to exist in the world as it is, and start asserting it unequivocally.

How strange, then, that throughout the spring and summer of this year *Commentary* wasn't able to stretch the protective cover of Peretz's parable to do at least as much for Jacobo Timerman as it had done for Menachem Begin. Its writers reacted rather more like the contemptible Rabbi of Chelm than like Ben Gurion to the Argentine publisher's charge that he'd been clandestinely held and tortured for thirty months by a part of his country's military regime primarily because of his Jewishness and his Zionism.

In the magazine's July issue, Mark Falcoff opined that, on the contrary, Timerman had been tortured primarily because of his leftist provocations—his deepening disillusionment with military rule, his decision to publish in his newspaper *La Opinion* the names of some of the thousands of Argentines mysteriously disappearing into secret cells and watery graves, and his circumstantial link to a financier with connections to leftist guerrillas. These indiscretions, declared Falcoff, were what gave a

few anti-Semitic malingers in the torture chambers their grotesque "outing" with Timerman.

After all, Falcoff reminded us, fairly echoing the Rabbi of Chelm across the ages, if Timerman had only gone about his business prudently, as most Argentine Jews do, he'd have escaped persecution, and, with it, the mistaken impression that he was living in a brutally repressive society. Or he could have emigrated, Falcoff suggested, again echoing the *Chelmer rebbe's* observation, paraphrased sardonically by Wisse a year ago, that "when danger mounts, the safest thing to do is to kick Yankele out of town." On the contrary, Wisse declared at that time, Jews should stand and fight! Except Timerman, *Commentary* tells us now.

To fathom this nettlesome discrepancy it is necessary to remember that over the past ten years a new agenda has been insinuating itself into the pages of this most influential of American Jewish magazines, under the heavy hand of Norman Podhoretz, and that that agenda is now on the verge of eclipsing Wisse's concerns. Unlike her, Podhoretz has always doubted that the survival of the Jews is "worth a hair on the head of a single infant"; but he has never doubted for an instant that the survival, indeed the greatness, of the America in which he's been *Making It** is worth much, much more, including—and this should shock no one—the occasional manipulation of Jewish concerns like those raised so imprudently by Timerman.

Podhoretz's America, as we all know, is engaged in a long, twilight struggle against the dark night of left totalitarianism and—he wants us to use the word—Communism.

* The title of Podhoretz's book about his quest for money, fame, and power.

It was in *Commentary's* pages that Podhoretz, Falcoff, Irving Kristol, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and others first expounded what has become one of the basic tenets of that struggle and of the Reagan administration's foreign policy.

In order to survive in the world, as Kirkpatrick explained in 1979 (Kristol had said the same thing ten years earlier), the United States may sometimes have to choose between two extremes—between unwavering support for "friendly" authoritarian regimes, on the one hand, and capitulation to the terrorist violence and "irreversible" totalitarianism of Marxist-Leninist guerrillas who threaten them. It was partly on the strength of that article and that basic tenet that Kirkpatrick became Ambassador to the United Nations; Elliot Abrams, Podhoretz's son-in-law and another *Commentary* contributor, became Under-Secretary of State; and Podhoretz himself, whose tract *The Present Danger* impressed Reagan as "superb," was considered for the directorship of the Voice of America, probably until it was realized that his brew is digestible only domestically.

Jacobo Timerman had the temerity not only to attack the "friendly" junta which restored God and order to the Argentine and lined up the country firmly behind the anti-Communist crusade; worse, he damaged the credibility of the basic assumptions which sustained not only that alignment, but also our larger foreign policy and, not incidentally, the careers of that policy's exponents and apologists. For *Commentary's* contributors, Timerman's experiences were less important than his subsequent determination to characterize his captors' mentality as "totalitarian," a shocking departure from the conventions they were laboring to

establish. Timerman wrote of his torturers:

They couldn't accept or comprehend that an Argentine patriot could simultaneously be a patriotic Jew, a Zionist of the left, . . . a defender of Salvador Allende, of the Soviet dissidents, and of political prisoners in Cuban jails. Their world was simpler. And in order to survive in that world, one needed to choose between two extremes. For many, the great majority, it was simple. For me, impossible.

And this, too, is what made the Jewish leaders of Buenos Aires regard me as an irritating element.

Timerman knew these words would irritate not only the Jewish leaders of Buenos Aires, but the Reagan apologists as well. And because he knew, he was of course damned by his critics as calculating and self-serving. Still, his insistence that right-wing authoritarianism contains seeds of irreversible totalitarianism presented them with a problem. And his declaration that Argentine anti-Semitism is as hideous in content if not in extent as the Nazis' posed even more of a problem, even for the otherwise preoccupied Podhoretz. For if Wise's writings are any indication at all, anti-Semitism is the one horror still potent enough in the minds of Reagan's Jewish apologists to make their world complex again. It plunges them into an intellectual and moral contradiction they can escape only by discrediting Timerman as an interpreter of his own experience.

Falcoff rose loyally to the task. But he immediately ran into a problem. His effort to calm his colleagues' jitters about anti-Semitism by insisting that Timerman was persecuted as a man of the left was no consolation at all to human rights defenders less disposed than *Commentary* to overlook the disappearance of thousands of Argen-

tines, most of whom were neither Jews nor terrorists. So Falcoff found himself shifting his ground to show that while Timerman wasn't persecuted as a Jew, neither was he quite the valiant liberal his human rights defenders made him out to be.

Whether these agile denigrations of the man's Jewishness and his political integrity qualify Falcoff as Timerman's newest torturer, the reader of *Commentary* may judge. But a bitter irony, for Falcoff as well as for Timerman, is that some on the militant left are only too happy to concur that the victim was really a liberal sell-out. After all, he hobnobbed with the generals; he was foolish or ingratiating enough to delude himself that a right-wing military regime would serve the constitution's intentions by saving the nation from the guerrilla anarchy of both right and left; only after the coup revealed the army's implacable cruelty and totalitarian predilections did Timerman begin to wake up. By then, of course, it was too late; he'd already given *Commentary* its justifications for supporting "authoritarian" regimes.

But if Timerman wasn't much of a liberal, then he cannot have been held and so cruelly tortured for thirty months for the "provocations" Falcoff earlier attributed to him! There had to be another reason, and we are led uncomfortably back to the victim's original claim that it was anti-Semitism: no other charges were ever brought; his torturers harped constantly on his assumed knowledge of Zionist conspiracies; indeed, as Falcoff admits, Timerman's Jewishness may have been the "secret amulet" that saved his life, only because his tormentors anticipated fantastic confessions that would confirm the conspiracy theories which lay somewhere near the heart of their

own justifications for seizing power.

It is important not to misrepresent what Timerman has said about anti-Semitism. He has *not* said, as David Sidorsky and others insist he did, that Argentine anti-Semitism is the same in implementation as the Nazi final solution, any more than the anti-Semitism encountered in Chelm actually involved wholesale extermination. What Timerman does describe is the opening of a bottomless Pandora's box of hateful fantasies, the coalescence in Argentina, as in Chelm, of a mentality *capable* of a Nazi resolution:

... does the key to it all lie in the scale? ...

I think that the key lies in the character of the hatred, its motive, its object. And it is that which has been repeated, returning like a perfect mummy that begins to walk, offering us again its symbols, its magic, its excitement from other times.

Isn't this frightening enough? ...

A curious fact emerged: in Argentina, the attitude of military examiners ... toward left-wing terrorists was the way you might feel toward an enemy ...

With Jews, however, there was a desire to eradicate ... hatred of the Jew was visceral, explosive, a supernatural bolt, a gut excitement, the sense of one's entire being abandoned to hatred ... One could hate a political prisoner for belonging to the opposite camp, but one could also try to ... turn him around ... But how can a Jew be changed?

How, indeed? And how comprehend the lust to eradicate him as he is, in Chelm, in Berlin, in Buenos Aires?

Commentary's writers used to be the experts about that. The Jew as sojourner, alien, surviving at the margins of homogeneous societies, flourishing in the pluralism of diverse and open ones, agile, entrepreneurial, walking on eggshells and thinking fast—the portrait has been embellished and debated over the years in the magazine's pages. When Jews couldn't become the merchants or financiers who widened the sphere of classical liberal autonomy, they tended to embrace worlds of their own imagining—

either a peoplehood cast up across time and space, wending its way through history with God's help, or a larger human community projected into the future, a universal community in which, as George Steiner put it, "only trees have roots; men have legs and are each others' guests."

Isolation and imagination bred tough spirits who'd submit to no one—those who like Marx, Freud, and Einstein put the perspective of the perennial outsider to brilliant use. *Commentary* understood that Jews carried in their bones, as it were, the sense of homelessness and vulnerability which in this century was coming to affect—or afflict—much of the rest of humanity. And perhaps it was because the Jews were such past masters at handling the contradictions of the modern age that they became targets of fear and resentment. Certainly the totalitarian mind, in flight from the ambiguities of the universalism Steiner projects, identified these brilliant outsiders as the enemy. That's why there is something at once shocking and dismally familiar about the declaration by one of Timerman's captors that Marx, Freud, and Einstein were destroyers of Christian civilization and hence enemies of Argentina.

But to take the discussion this far is to engage an irony intolerable to Jews who've embraced Norman Podhoretz's view of the world. It is the irony that totalitarians of the left have no monopoly on hatred of Jews and of all that Jews willy-nilly represent. True, the Jewish capitalist, as archetypal "usurer," could enjoy at least a precarious utility in more "Christian" authoritarian societies than in totalitarian ones, and he could even, in times of economic expansion, help widen the domain of the liberal state and culture. But sooner or later, others' frustrations with the contradictions of liberalism, if not of capitalism, will find their target in this "subversive" agent of liberalism's expansion.

And it isn't so surprising that, in turn, for every brilliant Jewish proponent of Steiner's vision, of a social vitality at odds with both capitalism and traditionalism,

there were other Jews who retreated, in those times of frustration and backlash, into defensive superiority, or who succumbed to a malevolence and power lust spawned in the depths of Jewish helplessness. The Jew as Shylock, creature of an atrophied legalism, sycophant to new configurations of established power and contemptuous of detractors below, fundamentally suspicious and opportunistic—that is a characterization which, if truth be told, has had its adaptive functions in a world manifestly unkind to progressive visions.

Timerman may have embodied something of this age-old Jewish contradiction as publisher of *La Opinion*, but he transcended it in the crucible of oppression. If he couldn't live with the right's flight from modernism into cries of blood and soil, neither could he give himself blindly to some of the left's more facile projections of universal collective transcendence, especially when these were to be ushered in through kidnappings and ransoms. When revolutionary awakening is force-fed, unresolved nationalistic passions have a way of taking over, and then it is the Jew, like Trotsky, who finds himself discarded.

Timerman was thus, *by default*, a liberal who believed that in the end there is only one "national" liberation the Jew can expect to fight for: his own. He admits—and Falcoff makes much of it—that had he been kidnapped by the guerrilla left, he'd have been shot as a counter-revolutionary Zionist.

Yet when Falcoff tries to prove by this that the left is inevitably worse for the Jews than the right, he can't find confirmation from Timerman's experience, or, indeed, from Jewish experience itself, Trotsky's emblematic demise notwithstanding. It's not necessary to defend every self-styled Marxist group to suggest that, when imported capitalist investment leads to attacks on liberal electoral politics and minimally adequate social planning, Jews can better hope to work in movements of the democratic left toward societies where people have legs and are each others' guests, than they can hope to join in their host nations' cries of blood and soil. But

as Timerman discovered, such work is dangerous; it requires great courage; and, for one whose agility and skill might have greater utility to the dominant right, it is fraught with painful ironies.

The *Commentary* crowd's handling of the Timerman case showed us how numb it has become to these ironies and to the sort of courage they demand. And if one attempts to locate its writers on the map of Jewish journeys and detours this century has given us, they begin to resemble nothing so much as those Jews who have taken the familiar byway into the propitiation of established power, driven, as it were, by the old subliminal Jewish panic, the desperation to buy time. It is a path which permits betrayal even of their fellow Jews in Argentina when security at home seems to warrant it.

The betrayal is the more searing for its subtlety, for the established Jewish community in Buenos Aires hasn't cried out for help. Timerman argues that,

judging from my own experience, the armed forces and trade unions could potentially become involved in extremely intense anti-Semitic activity if socio-economic conditions allow . . . Argentine Jews may then try to adjust to conditions without a struggle, passively accepting their reduced rights and the increasingly severe restrictions on ghetto territory.

Yet *Commentary* knows full well what would be wrong with such an accommodation. As Ruth Wisse put it a year ago:

Jews have often tried to reinvent their enemy in a more palatable image. They write out his conditions of acceptance for him, and then try to satisfy their idea of his expectations. They have not had much success with this strategy in this century. Nevertheless, they have not abandoned it.

Now that the Argentine Jewish Community seems to be practicing that strategy, Wisse is curiously silent.

Mark Falcoff also knows what would be wrong with too sanguine a view of anti-Semitic currents. A year ago, he wrote:

The very fact that ["the Jewish

Question" in Latin America] could be regarded as worthy of discussion in 1980 indicates the degree to which the Latin American republics are still grappling with some of the issues that poisoned the life of interwar Europe. The harsh fact is that these countries are still in search of their cultural identity, and, regardless of where they find it, Jews will have to be wary.

Yet today, writing about Timerman's alarms, Falcoff says:

. . . [while Timerman was in prison] life in the world outside simply went on much as it always had—and with few exceptions, the business community, the press, the political parties, and other civic forces willingly accepted the stewardship of the military . . . for most Argentines, including, it must be said, one of the largest Jewish communities in the world, it was not an intolerable place to live.

This easy shift in nuance reflects the most insidious sort of betrayal one Jew can visit upon another, the more so when coming from a magazine which knows how to be vigilant, which is always warning us against a failure of nerve, and which, only a year ago, was condemning the *Chelmer rebbe's* self-censorship and other Jewish accommodation strategies "which have not had much success . . . in this century." At least the pushy Begin, who is not above selling arms to the Argentine junta, has an answer to its Jews which comes from the bottom of his heart: "Come home to Israel, where you are needed, where you belong." That is hardly a rationale for supporting the junta, but it is at least more credible in its own terms coming from Begin than from *Commentary*.

All of which returns us to the question of what historic battle takes priority in *Commentary's* fevered imagination over the struggle against the horror which Timerman encountered, over the visceral hatred, the gut excitement of eradicating Jews. It is, of course, the greater horror of the left to those who've staked their lives upon the defense of American vitality and power.

Commentary's writers have made amply clear that they no longer understand, no longer can

bring themselves to trust, that vision of the left which even Timerman's equivocal story compels. They've settled for a more sinister understanding of why people rebel and of where the sources of social vitality really lie. It is an understanding which excludes not only the left of those "anxious, neurotic young men and women" whose terrorism both Timerman and Falcoff condemn, but also the broad, progressive movements of the social democratic left which are forced in their infancy into the death embrace of armed cadres, because their legitimate electoral victories in Chile, El Salvador, and Guatemala are overturned with American support, and because the basic human needs and intelligent social planning they espouse are shattered by investment schemes imposed by outsiders and oligarchies armed to the teeth by the United States.

II

It's important to note carefully how the truth is distorted, and there is no better place to begin than with Falcoff's earlier attempts to ascribe all destructive political activity to a neurotic youthful left. "Latin America has become a theater in which many Europeans and North Americans have chosen to play out their fantasies," he wrote in the October, 1976, *Commentary*; "What they see there has come to tell us less about that region than about their own attitudes toward property and society. The result is not—as they think—a sympathetic interest in another way of life, but the ultimate form of cultural narcissism—it is, figuratively speaking, dressing up Aztecs and Incas in costumes borrowed from old WPA 'proletarian' theater."

If Falcoff is preoccupied now with Timerman's slightly less indigenous fantasies, there is nevertheless a consistency between *Commentary's* attacks on American cheerleaders for Third World Socialism six years ago and its ex-coriolation of Anthony Lewis and other Timerman defenders today. Yet that consistency is really a bit dizzying: it is American critics like Lewis and the campus left who have "denied the region a life of its

own," as Falcoff puts it—and not American runaway factories and investors, agribusiness combines and speculators, marketing analysts and infant formula promoters, military and technical advisors, secret intelligence agents, narcotics entrepreneurs, tourists, and wealthy settlers. The real danger of social and political instability comes rather from the American left and its liberal dupes left over from the Carter administration. Without them, we are to understand, the armed, subversive left wouldn't have made the headway it has in recent years.

This can give one pause: undoubtedly American supporters of guerrilla factions sometimes misread the yearnings of Latins who have voted overwhelmingly for more modest reforms. And if some kind of democratic socialism might do those yearnings more justice than authoritarian capitalism, there is little question that Marxist-Leninist dictatorships hold the least promise. Yet the question remains whether, if dictatorships of that sort do triumph in Latin America, it will be thanks to Carter's admittedly flawed legacy more than Reagan's.

The question is important because Reagan's policy is handmaiden to patterns of investment and exploitation not framed in Washington. Even if one rejects some of the left's romantic notions about the inevitable Latin uprising against a monolithic Yankee imperialism, one can find in our cultural and economic relationship to much of the region an oppression no less real and searing for all the saving ironies its apologists try to tease out of it. Falcoff, Kirkpatrick, and *Commentary's* other contributors have yet to address, much less discredit, economist André Gorz's observation that in Third World countries "the sharpness of the contradiction between capitalist initiative and collective needs necessarily grows."

"When a capitalist group decides to invest in a given locality, it need not bother to ask itself . . . what social costs it will entail, what social needs it will engender, or what alternatives its private decision will render impossible," Gorz

writes; the investment often bears no relationship to nonmarketable local needs like education, health, or transportation. Setting up export industries may only reverse real local priorities, forcing people off the land and into shantytowns, for example, disrupting the community's social relations and ruining agriculture for domestic consumption while creating massive unemployment—in short, effecting the very "destabilization" which Kirkpatrick blames on the left and claims that "authoritarian" regimes manage to avoid.

Consider the scenario described by NACLA (North American Conference on Latin America) of a large agribusiness corporation which enters a fertile valley in Central America, contracting out work to the biggest of the area's independent farmers. They proceed to plant most of the valley over in sweetcorn, peas, asparagus, and other delicacies alien to the local diet, intended entirely for export, and in any case much too expensive for local consumption when they emerge from the corporation's recently constructed cannery nearby.

With extensive corporate credit in cash, seeds, and machinery, the contract farmers edge out the smaller independent and *ejido* (collective) farmers, some of whom must join displaced crop pickers on the cannery lines or become migrants following the harvests north into the United States. Wages in the cannery are pathetically low; it was built there in the first place because the host government promised cheap labor through its control of the unions, the electoral system, and the military and paramilitary units which smash reform efforts and suppress land occupations. Or, indeed, these units may be in the hands of large landowners politically to the right of the government.

During the time of transition there are massacres of *campesinos* occupying fields promised them by the government but sold instead to growers who have circumvented the agrarian reform laws by dividing their holdings among family members to escape redistribution. Subsequent rebellions, including an "illegal" cannery strike, extract

some concessions from the government, which is blocked, however, from implementing them by threats of "capital strikes" from the right.

Not surprisingly, urban social planning to cope with the dispossessed is almost an afterthought, a crisis reaction to shifting investment rather than a developmental priority—and Latin America is urbanizing more rapidly than other continents, according to Viron P. Vaky in the July issue of *Foreign Affairs*. In the early 1970s seven Harvard urbanologists visited Mexico City at the behest of a desperate government trying to cope with a population expected to reach thirty million in the capital city alone by 1985. True to their training, the professors modestly eschewed the "can-do" rhetoric of investment brochures, cautioning instead that economic balance between rural and urban regions "is usually achieved by sacrificing several percentage points in national growth rate." "Value-free" planners facilitate rather than challenge the social disorganization which Gorz describes; how can they mediate the conflict between balanced community development and foreign investment?

And not only foreign: in an article subtitled "Grass Roots Control," the *Wall Street Journal* reported that American-based multinationals in Mexico had learned to live comfortably with government rulings that their subsidiaries be mostly Mexican-owned. The newly-recruited native bourgeoisie, with its excellent government contacts and immunity from nationalist charges of foreign encroachment, could be even more neglectful of peasants' and workers' needs:

Last year a union strike paralyzed operations at Spicer. Mr. Senderos and DESC's [the Mexican subsidiary's] chairman, Antonia Ruiz Galindo, Jr., spent weeks at the Mexican Labor Department negotiating with the government until it agreed to order the strikers back to work. "We would have been dead without them," says Dana's president, Gerald Mitchell. "They took a very hard line which, as foreigners, we could never have gotten away with."

They wouldn't be taking that line, of course, were it not for the basic constraints of multinational investment, whose apparent hostility to local autonomy and well-being is the dog which will not stay buried despite government repression and orchestration of nationalist passions.

The problem was posed once again, this time more theatrically, as Falcoff would have it, but no less brutally, when urban guerrillas kidnapped U.S. Consul-General Terrence G. Leonhardy in Guadalajara and demanded, in addition to land reform and the usual cash ransom, that a communiqué be disseminated via the mass media denouncing, according to a summary in the 1973 Latin American Almanac, "Mexico's low health standards, its illiteracy and exorbitant credit rates, blaming the misery of impoverished workers and peasants on the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, the outflow of Mexican capital abroad, and government repression of students, workers, and peasants who tried to organize. The guerrillas denounced the government for trying to 'convince people that we are common delinquents, hired killers, cattle rustlers, or enemies of the country. Today, for the first time, and not voluntarily, the mass media are serving the masses . . .'"

Surely these are not scripts written by the American left, nor have the Mexicans, Nicaraguans, or Salvadoreans had to import from Cuba the complex feelings and commitments which lie behind them. But as he has tried to do now with Timerman, Falcoff simply refuses to grant even a kernel of truth to the rebels' pronouncements. Instead there has been a perpetual grasping at straws, even when this has led to a muddle of self-contradictory assertions.

When it was more fashionable to deride the use of American power, for example, Falcoff played to that posture. He sought to establish our innocence toward Latin misery by emphasizing "not only the frequent inability of the United States to prevent the emergence of unfriendly regimes in Latin America, but also its apparent incapacity to save its

beleaguered friends." How can we be to blame when we are so bumblingly inept, when "generations of dictators . . . have learned how to manipulate the United States Government on the petard-point of its own prejudices," extracting aid from us by warning of Red chaos and subversions? We Americans are such fools that we can't be serious oppressors. But one wonders whether Falcoff is trying to make Reagan's El Salvador strategists the beneficiaries of these 1976 apologies today.

When confronted with evidence that capitalist investment does have wrenching, even chaotic effects upon Latin societies, Falcoff takes one of two tacks. The first concedes that there are problems, but asserts that, on balance, the developments are progressive. Would the critics return the Latins to rural, semi-feudal poverty—as the Khmer Rouge did in Cambodia? Even those nostalgic for a pre-capitalist order mythically bound to the land and the stars know that we're all irreversibly launched by now on a brave new journey to which capitalism at least promises access, however painful.

There is even a silver lining behind the cascade of American cosmetics, gadgets, and Spanish language broadcasts of "Mighty Mouse" and "I Love Lucy," along with the transformations of farm youths into stockboys at Woolworth's or assembly line workers at Figure Flattery Brassiere. We can take heart, Falcoff tells us, from the cultural resistance such an influx engenders—from the murals of Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the poems of Rubén Darío and Pablo Neruda, and the novels of Miguél Ángel Asturias, all originating in a "creative response to the threat of American hegemony." In what he must think is an example of his respect for the region's autonomy, Falcoff opines, rather condescendingly, I think, that "in the clash of cultures, the Latin Americans may ultimately learn who they really are."

But what if, on balance, the capitalist transformation is so wrenching and impoverishing, so disruptive of traditional security,

that the "creative response" becomes political? Then the apologist takes his second tack and discovers the scent of tragedy in human affairs. Capitalism may be bad, *en fin*, but there is really no other "dispensation waiting in the wings of history to manifest itself," Falcoff announces, ever-solicitous toward what he assumes is the left's love of theatrical motifs. Claims to the contrary can be made "only on faith," and any claim by the faithful to "represent the will of the masses must be taken for precisely what it is—a literary expression, nothing more."

Notice what has happened to Diego Rivera, Pablo Neruda, et al. Their "creative response to the threat of American hegemony" is the more poignant for its impotence, charming precisely because divorced from a viable politics. It is much the same line being cast around Timerman's "moving personal statement," from which, however, we are not to draw any serious political conclusions.

One must admit that, as Tom Buckley has reported from El Salvador and Paolo Freire has reported, in a much different fashion, from Brazil, that much that passes for resistance is anything but heroic; a peasant whose only experience of social bonds has been of peonage may tend only to become an oppressor himself, not a liberator; and the same is true, albeit in a different way, of middle class youths driven to rebellion. But it is the tendency to inflate and trade upon these weaknesses—to patronize and at the same time disparage people's struggles to overcome internalized constraints—that characterizes the apologetics of oppression everywhere, from the tauntings of the Grand Inquisitor to the maunderings of spokesmen for the corporate state. Even if capitalism stands on center stage in Latin America, with no other "dispensation" about to replace it, there are hard questions one would expect *Commentary's* writers to ask:

Given that in the race of development against population growth there must be painful upheavals in traditional patterns, just how brutal

must the disruption of minimal human sustenance and community be? Need the inevitable confusion involve the affronts to human dignity which occur when an exploitative, profit-hungry elite shunts people off ancestral land and into shantytowns, failing to elicit their consent or energy?

If capitalism is truly addressing people's needs, why can it not produce credible popular leaders who engage them in dialogue about social change, who explain, cajole, and respond to a popular faith and participation in the planning? If, out of respect for Latin America's ability to assume what Falcoff calls "the historic responsibility for its own development," the critics of capitalism should withdraw their projections and intrusions upon the region's life, why should not the investors, businessmen, and military advisors—who, by Falcoff's own admission, are often at least as crassly disrespectful of it—also withdraw at least some of their own projections?

It is not necessary to canonize Fidel Castro or to support every armed insurrection to ask these questions of the apologists for the dominant dispensation. Before they go on prating about the American left or Jacobo Timerman, they ought to be made to address what Erik Erikson has called "the matter of establishing . . . an average expectable continuity for child-rearing and education everywhere, which has become an urgent matter for human survival."

But this is precisely what the current pattern of capitalist investment in Latin America has disrupted so profoundly, in part because of its apparent incompatibility with budgeting and planning for the social consequences of its adventures. Creative participation in developing the continuities Erikson describes cannot be the prerogative of elites alone, or the casual by-product of Harvard consultants to assembly lines. Child-rearing and education require whole, resilient people, and such people require secure communities. And since this simple truth is increasingly apparent to ordinary people in this century, identifica-

tion with the oppressed need not involve the projection of middle class fantasies onto others, or nostalgia for ancient folkways, or paralyzing guilt about American misdeeds, or even a blind denunciation of all capitalist development as an unrelieved nightmare.

What it does require is an adult capacity to recognize both the inevitability and the integrity of insurrection when efforts to balance society are repressed. And identification with the oppressed means being able to recognize and support the positive, pluralist potential in popular movements, even when they declare themselves "anti-American" and "anti-capitalist." It means understanding the destructive, polarizing consequences of helping oligarchies, armies, and figleaf juntas smash the social democratic unions, media, local councils, and churches capable of depolarizing society.

Without apologetics from *Commentary* and arms from Alexander Haig, these reactionary elements might have to negotiate with the positive, pluralist movements—as they ultimately did in Zimbabwe, to excellent effect, despite American jitters about left extremists. But in El Salvador and other Latin countries, the right can now afford to become intransigent, driving constructive socialists into destructive activities.

For Jews to align themselves with reactionary forces, which are more disruptive of both tradition and enlightened reform than the democratic left could ever be, is reprehensible. Yet it is at least intelligible by the light of ancient insecurities and the accommodations Jews in tight spots have felt compelled to make. *Commentary's* handling of Timerman's experience goes a gigantic step further. For when ancient insecurities cripple the struggle against anti-Semitism itself, and foreclose the social democratic options which are ultimately the only solvent of anti-Semitism and other hatreds, we are witnessing a self-destruction more insidious and devastating than any *Commentary* has discovered on the left.

letter

May 28, 1981

Dear Editor:

I was interested to read Barbara Howes' reminiscences of the literary magazine, *Chimera* (1942-47) in her interview with Karla Hammond in *Bennington Review*, number nine. Miss Howes deserves the thanks of the literary community for having kept *Chimera* going through the difficult years of World War II, a time when few literary publications of its caliber were in existence.

However, when Miss Howes says that it was "started by Frederick Morgan and Bill Arrowsmith—among others," she is overstating my role. Full credit for founding *Chimera* must go to William Arrowsmith and the late James Fearon Brown: it was their idea, they brought it into existence. It was only after the first issue had been published that I was invited to become an editor; I accepted, but imminent military service made it impossible for me to have more than a marginal association with the magazine. And this brings me to a second small correction. Miss Howes' statement that the early editors of *Chimera* "were drafted" is inaccurate in so far as it applies to me: I enlisted.

Frederick Morgan
Editor
The Hudson Review