

Seed

Energy and Freedom

Bernhard Rensch, in *Biophilosophy* (translated by C.A.M. Sym), makes an assertion that is as challenging as it is fundamental: discussing "free will", he says, "even limited freedom would infringe the law of conservation of energy" (212). This law, the first law of thermodynamics, states that matter-energy can be neither created nor destroyed (but only transformed), and is regarded as one of the principles underlying the way things are.

Although Rensch does not elaborate at this point, his general emphasis upon the immutability of cause-and-effect suggests that he means: the exercise of will involves the use of energy; since energy can be neither created nor destroyed, the energy involved in the exercise of will must already exist; the source of such energy and the terms on which we get it depend upon complicated sequences of causation over which, ultimately, we have no control. "For every 'spontaneous' thought (in a strict sense)," Rensch says, "which is also matched by processes of excitation in the cerebral neurons would represent the 'fresh beginning' of a causal sequence, and would thus conflict with the conservation of energy as well as with the uninterrupted action of the causal law."

The argument over free will and determinism is almost as old as history--which suggests either that it is merely antiquated or that it is very important. Especially when "freedom" (which we regard, at least in some sense, to be the essence of personality) is seen to contradict the laws of the universe (which are not only basic to "science", but which may even express the will of a "Creator") are we disturbed. If freedom is merely a feeling caused by the association of "volitional thought and action" with the already-determined "complex of ideas concerning the self" and manifested in certain physiological activity, then any discussion which has as its policy *objective* freedom (as opposed to a "feeling of freedom") is wrongheaded. Concern to establish political conditions in which freedom is maximized is futile if there is no such thing as real choice. Indeed, what happens would seem not to be the result of *policy* at all.

The implications of Rensch's position go beyond politics (although they of course underly politics): the very fabric of the universe is involved. Is the universe a closed thermodynamic system? Where did energy come from in the first place? Cause-and-effect, which is so crucial to Rensch's argument, is a process that can take place only in time: what is time? What is the significance of the theological concept of timelessness or eternity--as opposed, say, to the *perpetuity* of Rensch's view? How does eternity intersect with time, and what does this mean? How can the law of entropy (which, Rensch implies, involves the disintegration and reabsorption into the undifferentiated "All-one" of the individual) be reconciled with such a doctrine as the Resurrection of the body? Can it?

We do not pretend to be able to answer these questions--far from it. But we do wish to indicate their crucial significance, and we shall allude to them--perhaps even explore some of their more mundane implications--in future issues of *Seed*.

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Our Policy

SEED aspires to fulfil a unique role transcending the functions of other magazines and journals.

Our purpose is neither to propagandize in the sense of promoting some fixed point of view or body of thought nor merely to comment on current events.

Our partisanship does not extend beyond two considerations. Firstly, we believe that reality does exist: it is not a matter of opinion and will assert its authority over all opinions that contradict it. All sanctions reside in reality; opinion has none. Secondly, we believe in the desirability of extending human freedom. Genuine freedom is contingent upon our comprehension of reality, since to the extent that men disregard reality, they court personal and social disaster.

In other words, far from conforming to the modern view that value judgments are to be avoided, SEED will intentionally consist of a succession of value judgments, which will constitute the principal criterion of its success. Man cannot approach truth without rigorous formation of value judgments and perfecting of definitions. Discovery and refinement of the correct principles for human action and association will be the focus of our attention within the field of reality. If we carry our investigation of the nature of reality far enough, we shall illuminate the way to the formulation of sound policy.

We have no delusions about the facility of the course on which we are embarking. It is possibly the most difficult course open to us. However, its value should be proportional to the efforts it requires. If the distractions to intelligence and will which characterize contemporary society are, as we believe them to be, fundamentally unsatisfying, we are confident that some seekers of truth will involve themselves in the experiment that SEED represents. Such persons are the only ones capable of responding to such an experiment.

We approach our undertaking in the spirit of making an offering that will call forth latent creative capacities. If the ideas that SEED disseminates have validity and settle in good soil, they will grow. Moreover, their growth will be progressive and cumulative. SEED will serve as a medium permitting the cross-fertilization of adventurous intellects, thereby diminishing the effects of the entropic phenomenon that paralyzes development by compelling men to struggle to find truths that they have lost sight of and had to rediscover repeatedly during the past.

If our project is conducted correctly, it will at the least generate a new conceptual vigour among a segment of the community — and perhaps even result in the formation of new men.



Sainthood

The concept of the saint is peculiar to the Christian heritage. Most religions have venerated Holy Men, but the saint is a Holy Man with a difference. That difference is the lively impress of personality; for, whereas other religions typically assessed holiness in terms of rejection of the world (in effect, the annihilation of personality), the Christian emphasis on the momentous role of individual initiative in the total scheme of Creation encouraged men to be themselves while pursuing the objectives of their faith. As a result, the company of saints included an incredible array of unique personalities, who were remembered not for their uniformity, but for their diverse contributions to a patchwork of good life.

Nevertheless, certain phenomena are associated with sainthood in general. For instance, it is not linked to the quest for material security or high temporal office. A king *could* become a saint, but this was exceptional. Typically, also, the saint would be found opposing forms of coercion encountered in the economic and political domains: better than anyone else, he understood the impossibility of imposing salvation. Consequently, he resisted the excessive imperatives of the temporal power—often at the sacrifice of his own life. His reward, paradoxically, was one to which he would have been indifferent: as a saint, he was respected above all other men, princes and popes included.

In other words, saints disposed of immense power; but the basis of this power was not courts, armies, or economic blackmail. Their influence was not dependent on imposing legal sanctions or withholding the necessities of life. The saints' power flowed from personality, which, itself, *commanded* emulation of their behaviour.

Times have changed: the saints whose character crackled and flamed in multifarious ways is not popular with the architects of the collectivist era. Undistinguishable human putty is better suited than fiery independence to the operation of large organizations. This change is strikingly reflected in the men being selected as the saints' successors today—those we are encouraged to "look up to" and imitate. The modern model is not the person who has cultivated his spiritual values rather than accommodated the temptations of

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Transfer and Transmutation

In this conclusion of an article begun last month, a few more aspects of the possible confusions occasioned by the misunderstanding of "metaphor" (with special reference to money) are investigated.

The Conditioned Response

Sir Francis Bacon, in the *Novum Organum*, describes what he calls the *Idols of the Market Place* as "idols which have crept into the understanding through the alliances of words and names." "For," he says, "men believe that their reason governs words, but it is also true that words react on the understanding, and it is this that has rendered philosophy and the sciences sophisticated and inactive.... Whence it comes to pass that the high and formal discussions of learned men end oftentimes in disputes about words and names.... Yet even definitions cannot cure this evil in dealing with natural and material things; since the definitions themselves consist of words, and those words beget others, so that it is necessary to recur to individual instances...."¹⁶ His observations are entirely germane to our discussion of signs and things signified: when "dealing with natural and material things", we have to go back to "particular instances"; we have to get behind the sign, which (as Bacon observes) might have become an idol (or, a literalized metaphor). And his designation of this kind of idol as "of the Market Place" is peculiarly apt to our discussion of money.

Last month, we examined one aspect of "the literalization of metaphor" (again, in the broad sense of a transfer or a carrying over) in regard to money—namely, the desire to represent wealth by wealth, the "commodity" system of currency. This tendency, we suggested, was regressive in that it represents a return to "barter", and a turning away from abstract thought. At the same time, because it insists upon using one commodity to stand for another, it invites confusion between things (the man who has become "wealthy" through hoarding gold may find that, in a famine, he has nothing to eat because he has traded away all his grain). Perhaps the analogy for this in Bacon's science would be to attempt to study the moon by examining green cheese.

Another aspect of this same problem is the taking of a sign which is less obviously intrinsically valuable

itself for the thing signified. This results from constant association of the two—to the point that what lies behind the sign is forgotten. The principle is that involved in the conditioned response, or the reflex. In Pavlov's famous experiment (it will be recalled), a dog normally salivated when presented food. A bell (that is, another stimulus) was rung in conjunction with the offering of food—again, the salivary response was elicited. Eventually, of course, by use of the bell stimulus alone, the experimenter was able to elicit the response proper to the presentation of food. In this example, the food corresponds to the "thing", while the bell corresponds to the "sign": the response appropriate to the thing is elicited by the sign (which, in terms of the dog's wants, is of no intrinsic value). We have suggested that man is a sign-using animal; certainly, in this instance, the dog has learned a sign. But (I believe) the difference between the canine faculty and the human one lies in the dog's inability to regard the sign as a sign. If I am not mistaken, psychologists have "succeeded" in inducing "nervous breakdowns" in animals by substituting conditioned stimuli for real stimuli and leaving the real wants of the animals unsatisfied.

The Technique of Frustration

The same is true in the case of human beings. Trained to react to the stimulus "money" (be it pieces of coloured paper or figures written in their bank pass-books) as if it were wealth itself, they are subject to manipulation by figures, by numbers—which may or may not have anything to do with economic reality. That is, they become subject only to financial phenomena, and lose the capacity to discern the physical reality underlying financial indexes. Thus, for example, the Depression of the 1930's was primarily a *financial* occurrence (if we are to believe the stories of grain burned, livestock destroyed, and other produce literally "dumped"). Similarly, the economic reality underlying the financial recovery of World War II was waste and

destruction on a hitherto unknown scale. The relative meaninglessness of the sign, money, is vividly illustrated by the Weimar inflation of the 1920's—one needed a wheel-barrow full (so we are told) of the sign to buy a loaf of bread. Was the reality of the situation that a loaf of bread was now a thousand times as difficult to produce? Yet the fluctuations of the sign have caused the collapse of nations.

Dying Metaphors

Signs or metaphors can become ineffective (or destructive) through being taken literally or through "dying"—to use George Orwell's term. A dying metaphor, he explains, is one that is used reflexively and therefore, often, incorrectly. It is one whose meaning has become fuzzy or dark; it is used without thought. Orwell suggests that the prevalence of such metaphors (as an indication of increasingly imprecise thought) is an index of cultural decline. This point, too, is one that has application to the special case of money.

By a process of transfer first, and, later, of psychological transmutation, money is changed not only into gold, but into wealth itself. The subsequent devaluation (generally through inflation) of money makes it, if not a dying metaphor, at least one whose effectiveness is being diluted. (We will recall that the essence of money is its power of effective demand.) The power of money to evoke a response of one kind (that is, to demand goods and services) is diminishing; at the same time, of course, its psychological grip is increasing—precisely *because* it is losing its power. A man who is fairly sure that his effective demand is relatively stable (in fact, if there is such a thing as economic progress, purchasing power should be increasing) need not spend all his time worrying about money—which, more and more, involves "investing" it in unscrupulous schemes to allow *consumers* to buy things. A man who sees his position constantly under assault must become preoccupied with money—with the sign of wealth.

"Individual Instances"

At this point, we must recur to Bacon's point that arguments involving signs tend to be deductive—even to the point of assuming the existence of non-existent things, "fictions which owe their origin to false and idle theories". Such "theories" in the economic realm have been referred to repeatedly in these pages—"full

employment", "export or die", "a balanced budget" (which, as Douglas has observed, would be an indication of a static economy). It is upon these (and other like) "false and idle theories" that most discussions of money are based—and they always issue in the same old whirligig of wind. (Witness the first of the televised Ford-Carter debates: "The only way to defeat inflation is to cure unemployment." "I am going to provide jobs. [At the same time!] I am going to streamline government spending. [Later.] I am going to increase government spending in certain areas. By fiscal year 1981 I am going to balance the budget." What can it all mean?) The old assumptions have to be done away with, and "natural and material things" (we are talking about economics) have to be examined afresh.

The questions which should be asked are: Are our resources really diminishing? Why? Are people becoming less capable, less educated, less technically adept? Is machinery becoming less sophisticated? Are transportation and communication breaking down? Where are we being wasteful? (For example, why has the Ford Motor Company, after making cars for over half a century, only recently perfected the technique of making car bodies that rust to pieces in a year and a half?) These are real economic questions.

These matters have led us somewhat astray from the subject at hand, namely, "transfer and transmutation". Yet they are important to it. Money—the sign—should be a reflection of economic reality. At the moment, of course, just as (to quote Bacon again) "words react on the understanding", so money controls economic reality. Thus, when a project is to be undertaken, the question is not asked "Do we have the available men, machines, material, and know-how to complete this?" but "Can we get the money?" The question is never, "Can we *afford* to do this in real terms?"; it is always, "Can we afford to do this in monetary or financial terms?" The inversion is almost complete: rather than the reality controlling and determining the sign, the sign (as in the case of Pavlov's dog) controls and determines the reality. Idolatry—or, as Ezra Pound would have it, pecuniolatry.

The Substratum of Reality

We have spent a good deal of time and space outlining what money should *not* be. What should it be?

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Demythologizing the Chosen

The saying that, "Ideas have legs," is quite inadequate as an indicator of the relationship of ideas to our lives. Whether we are conscious of their influence or not, ideas govern all aspects of human initiative, from the slightest to the most world-shattering. Both the good issuing from a right idea, and the harm resulting from a wrong idea, can be overwhelming. Therefore, we do well to keep the ideas entering and evolving in our minds under close and constant scrutiny.

Men and Ideas

One of the ideas whose passage through history is especially strewn with havoc and ruin is that of "the chosen people"—that is, the concept that the divine or natural selection of any group to determine developments in human society can be ascertained by some distinguishing characteristic. This idea makes a direct appeal to pride (the desire to be in a special category separate from and superior to the "ordinary" man), and its effects seem to justify those who have stressed the primordial importance of this vice. The persons whose lives have been shattered as a result of the ambitions of certain others to appropriate outlandish privileges or recast their fellow men in a mould congenial to their own preferences are numberless; and it should be clear that so long as any man or group of men is bent upon imposing his or their will upon others the world will not be at peace.

Within living memory, we have the examples of the Nazis and their chosen race and the Communists and their chosen class. Happily, the Aryan myth is exploded; and the proletariat is looking more and more like an anachronism, rather than the vanguard of the forces of progress. However, what is perhaps the prototype of all chosen people theories is still flourishing in the form of Zionism. The threatening situation existing in the Middle East is but the latest of the penalties we are suffering for failing squarely to confront the implications of the tenacious myth of "the chosen".

Zionist Historical Conception

The Zionist historical model contains the following elements:—

(1) *The continuous existence of something called the "Jewish nation" during several millenia.* The defini-

tion of this "nation" is unclear. Contrary to what might be expected, Zionists do not perceive it as synonymous with the adherents of Judaism as a religion.

(2) *The direct descent of contemporary representatives of the Jewish nation from the Jews of Biblical account.* "We are members of a common family, bearers of a common history."¹ "What have the Jews in common? Not simply a religion... A common national origin, certainly..."² The Jewish "we" implies extension far back in time. One of the leading protagonists of Zionism in this century, Chaim Weizmann, told Lord Balfour that, "We had Jerusalem when London was a marsh."³

(3) *The sustained validity of the Jews' territorial claims upon Palestine as a "homeland".* A recent issue of a prominent Zionist publication, characterizing as a myth the belief that Israel was first created in 1948, asserts: "The Jewish people have maintained ties with their historical homeland for more than 3,000 years."⁴ Israel is described as "our ancestral land."⁵ "We came to our Homeland in order to be planted in our natural soil from which we have been uprooted."⁶

(4) *The absence of the Jewish nation from its homeland being an imposed condition—an Exile.* "Our people have been uprooted and scattered to the winds."⁷

(5) *The rectification of injustice through the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East.* That the immigration of Jews into Israel is considered to be a reversal of the expulsion and suffering of years past is evident from the expressions which speckle Zionist literature on the subject. Such terms as "redemption", "restoration", "re-occupation", "rebirth", "rehabilitation", and "resettlement" are common. Israel is often treated as the ultimate form of salvation for the Jews.

Non-Jewish Support

This integrated conceptual framework has been used to justify the incredible initiative of the creation of Israel, which not only penalized the previous inhabitants of Palestine, but resulted in the festering and dangerous situation that has since existed in this key geographical area. Zionists have bolstered their case with every imaginable means of persuasion. One example is the reinforcement of the mythology of their cause by means of such emotion-triggering words (for Jews) as *Diaspora, Galut, Holocaust, Aliyah, etc.*—which, as we

shall see, have little factual basis.

So potent have the historical model and/or the promotion of it become that many non-Jews have participated in its propagation. For instance, the *Congressional Record* of April 25, 1958, reports the following remarks made by John F. Kennedy in the Senate on that date:—

Mr. President, the history of Israel reaches back 3,000 years, yet Israel is one of the new nations of the world. I think the re-creation of Israel, after a long period when its citizens were in exile throughout the world, is easily one of the most dramatic stories in history. Israel's rebirth....

In fact, practically every major political figure in the West has obligated himself (and, frequently, thus, those whom he allegedly represents) to supporting this position and its morally dubious ramifications. The statements by the candidates in the recent presidential campaign in the United States illustrate how pronouncements on this matter have become *de rigueur* for politicians aspiring to reach the higher echelons of power. For some of these "Gentile Zionists" this necessity has been more easily faced by virtue of an upbringing influenced by the Old Testament with its emphasis upon the tribe of Israel as the chosen of God. For them, the "restoration" of Israel was seen as consistent with divine intentions.

Underlying all [the activity of the British non-Jewish Zionists] was the feeling that in doing something for the Jews they were righting ancient wrongs, repaying in some small measure the enormous debt owed by the Gentile world for the suffering inflicted upon the Jewish people over the centuries. Nurtured on the scriptures, they acted and felt as though they were fulfilling an historical mission.

R.E.K.

(To be continued)

¹*Debates on Zionism* (Tel Aviv, 1969), 119. Inside the title page is the statement, "This booklet is published for use in Zionist Youth movements and Jewish Student organizations. It is not intended for public sale."

²*Ibid.*, 189.

³*To the House of Their Fathers*, Barnet Litvinoff (New York, 1965), 40.

⁴*Near East Report* (Washington), XIX, no. 40 (October 1, 1975), 171.

⁵*Debates on Zionism*, 91.

⁶*Ibid.*, 104.

⁷*Ibid.*, 176.

⁸*The Gentile Zionists: A Study in Anglo-Zionist Diplomacy, 1929-1939*, N.A. Rose (London, 1973), 225.

("Sainthood", continued from p. 2)

social prestige and material acquisition, but he who has either indulged the latter or used them to subject others to his own will.

Canonization usually follows death, and one of the most publicized deaths in recent months is that of Mao Tse-tung. Government spokesmen and the major communications media have portrayed him as an inspiration and guide for past generations and those yet to come. His life is held out as an example for all. The Canadian Minister of External Affairs, Mr. MacEachen, stated that he had "learned with deep regret of the passing of China's great leader, Chairman Mao Tse-tung. He . . . was one of the truly great figures of our times. Mao Tse-tung's memory is imperishable and will doubtless act as a profound inspiration to the people and leaders of China in dealing with the challenges of the future."

The statement has a number of odd features. For instance, the use of the word "passing" seems inappropriate as a description of the death of a man who maintained that nothing exists in the universe except matter in motion. A soul can be said to "pass on"—if you believe in souls and their immortality. However, by his own criteria, the only way Mao could "pass on" is as garden fertilizer; and Mr. MacEachen surely was not trying to suggest this. In fact, the Chairman will not be allowed to pass on even in this sense, since his body is to be preserved for public display. The bodies of saints in previous ages, we are told, miraculously resisted decomposition by themselves. The new ones have to be pickled.

Furthermore, the suitability of the Minister's insistence on Mao's greatness can be questioned. If we take "great" as meaning merely "taking actions on a grand scale", it will do. Mao not only was an admirer of the "greatest" mass-killer in history, but eventually usurped the title from his idol. The Walker Report published by the U.S. Senate Committee of the Judiciary in 1971 estimated the deaths of Chinese under "the Great Helmsman's" direction at between 1½ and 3 times the total population of Canada. His audacity was similarly gigantic—when, for example, after years of violently denouncing imperialism, he had his troops overrun neighbouring states and made the local people vassals of his megalomaniacal will.

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("Transmutation", continued from p. 4)

Recall that, in our earlier discussion, we made the point that the essential elements in money were psychological—effective demand and general acceptability. That is why almost anything (at one time or another) has been used as money: the *form* of money is merely conventional; its acceptability as demand is what counts. If this is true, then it seems reasonable that money should take as "efficient" a form as possible. (This is largely a technical question, which I cannot answer specifically. Obviously, however, as currency, pieces of paper are more efficient than boulders with holes bored through them.) That the form of money is relatively unimportant is indicated by the relative ease with which people can accept a new currency (the cultural discontinuity involved in a currency change is another, and important, question): when I was in Greece last spring there were four different sets of currency in use, and no one seemed troubled. And, of course, the Weimar inflation is a fairly clear indication that confidence (and not the piece of paper) is the essential element in money.

So much for the sign, which is not of great moment as long as *it is recognized as a sign*. What of the underlying reality? Let us return to our example of barter. The man who wanted to buy the cart with two cows had effective demand insofar as he had real wealth. If he had said that he had two cows and he did not, his effective demand (represented not only in the cart owner's willingness to accept cows in exchange but also in his confidence in the cow owner's word) would be obviated. If he used two leather discs as money, those discs would be effective as demand only if the seller had confidence that they had purchasing power—not only that somebody else would accept them, but that there was something to buy. If there were no real goods to buy, then a condition of inflation would exist: there would be money for which no corresponding wealth existed. In other words, the sign would be completely dissociated from any underlying substance. Moreover, our example suggests that inflation, correctly, indicates a situation in which there is a deficiency of real wealth.

Thus, the power of money as demand is related to real wealth and, specifically, to people's confidence in their ability to produce wealth. It follows that

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To Those Who Share Our Concern

The publication of SEED is an enterprise which we feel is of cardinal importance to the revitalization of our culture. This endeavour represents the concern of a few individuals sensible of their responsibility to reverse, where possible, what they perceive to be the deterioration of the ideological and practical bases of this culture, and prepared to make personal sacrifices in the accomplishment of this objective.

However, our success can only be in proportion to our resources, which — particularly in their financial aspect — are quite limited. We are determined to proceed, even within those limitations. But we would like to do more.

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("Transmutation", continued from p. 7)

inflation in a period when real wealth, real productive capacity, is increasing, is an anomaly. It is only when things are scarce, difficult to produce, and physically costly that inflation is an accurate index of reality. When production is efficient—that is, when we can produce more than we use (at least, immediately) with decreasing difficulty, the proper financial indicator is money whose effective demand is *increasing*. The point is that the relative "value" of money as demand should be a function of real economic efficiency. Otherwise, the sign is incorrectly related to reality. Persistent inflation indicates that we are becoming persistently less efficient, which seems anomalous in a period of "accelerating technological advance". Are we becoming less efficient? If so, why?

Or, are we merely entangled in a web of idolatry of figures in books? And is this the cause (not the consequence) of decreasing efficiency?

D.R.K.

⁶ Francis Bacon: *A Selection of His Works*, ed. Sidney Warhaft (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), 341-2.

("Sainthood", continued from p. 6)

The Christian saint's memory was preserved to inspire those who followed. Mr. MacEachen, and hundreds of other commentators—pundits and politicians—believe that Mao's memory should be similarly perpetuated. Is this a wish to see the people of China all trying to "liquidate" and "remould" any of their countrymen whose thinking fails to coincide perfectly with their own? Or is it a wish that the precepts enunciated by Mao in his many writings should be applied by his successors—such as his famous principle that, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun"?¹

Less well known is the fact that Mao went even further in eulogizing coercion of this sort. In the same article in which he made the preceding assertion, he stated that, "All things grow out of the barrel of a gun." The old saints held that all things come of God. They wanted to induce the right orientation of free wills; Mao opted to impose his conceptions on his environment through violence and compulsion. They stood outside all man-made systems; he was a builder of systems making totalitarian claims upon his fellows.

The Big Brothers placarded all over Communist and other absolutist states are really a concession to the power of personality—so gloriously revealed in the institution of sainthood. Ironically, they contradict the very thesis on which these states are based, namely, that good will result from reducing human needs, thought, and action to a common level.

Of course, paste-and-paper caricatures of personality assembled by public relations experts cannot match the potency of the real thing. For this reason, the main battle between the foes and promoters of the flowering of the individual will be fought over the media by which personality is communicated. The enemy is attempting to monopolize these media—or, at least, to establish monopoly control by the media at its disposal of the receptive time of the members of the community. The progress of its success can be gauged by the consistency and extravagant nature of the recent lauding of Mao Tse-tung.

R.E.K.

¹ "Problems of War and Strategy," (1938), *Selected Works* (Peking, 1964), II, 225.

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