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The Ordeal of Otto Otepka*

(A BOOK REVIEW FROM American Opinion, DECEMBER, 1969)

Drop everything! Go out and get people to read this book. Read it yourself, even if you think you know everything in it. You don't. Nobody could. I'm sure even the author can't remember it all, it is so crammed full of facts. But he remembers what it proves, and you will too. It proves that the United States suffered a "complete collapse of internal security throughout the government by mid-1968". (Page 439.)

Proves, too, that the Nixon Administration has changed nothing essential. Much as I hate to give away any part of the end of the story, which has action, plot, suspense, I'll tell you now (you're going to read the book anyway, of course) that on Page 452, having put you through a graduate course in the subversive perfidy of Dean Rusk's State Department as it progressively entrapped, isolated, demoted, harassed, and attempted to ruin patriotic security officer Otto Otepka, author William J. Gill reminds you that on February 21, 1969, Richard Nixon's Secretary of State William Rogers "upheld Dean Rusk's decision" to reprimand Otepka and remove him from security work in the State Department. And says Gill (correctly, without any doubt), it was a decision which climax a "conspiracy against Otepka and the dismemberment of State Department security."

It seems that it did little or no good to change Party labels in the last election. Well, it did this much good—it showed that you can't save the country just by voting out one set of usurpers. The Conspiracy has a platoon system of front men.

Internal security has been the American Achilles' heel ever since the Nazi menace was destroyed. We made common cause with the Communists against Hitler—or we let them make common cause with us, for they were not always against Hitler—and they have been in our system like strontium 90 ever since. I firmly believe that there is not an agency in Washington which does not have Communist commissars in control positions within it. Not only does this mean that we are incapable as a government of thwarting any vital interest of world Communism, it means also that the foreign fiascoes such as Cuba and Vietnam, and the domestic disasters such as the destruction of higher education and the return to Detroit of the savage Robert F. Williams† that these successive national landslides down the slope to Avernus—are not simply accidental or natural.

Forgive the tautology, but internal security is necessary to national security. Internal security is necessary above all in the Department of State, our executive agency for foreign relations, and in the Department of Defense. We simply don't have it in either agency. The Otepka case is a ghastly paradigm of the intricate peril of an America caught in the Communist net.

Yet lesser Leviathans than the United States have escaped from nets before, and we will escape from this one. William J. Gill's remarkable book is in more ways than one a specific reason for hope. In the first place, the fact that he had the courage to write it, and Arlington House had the courage to publish it, proves that we are not wholly a nation of sheep. In the second place, the knowledge, industry, and skill which he reveals in the writing prove that professional journalism of a high order has not, as we are so often tempted to fear, sold out lock, stock, and barrel to the Conspiracy. (Yes, I know, American Opinion and The Review Of The News have been proving that for some time, but help is surely needed.)

It takes courage to call Dean Rusk a "Number 1 villain", and to call Deputy Undersecretary of State for Administration William J. Crockett a "cover-up man", as Gill does (Pp. 364-365)—and that is just one example taken at random of the strong language with which the book is peppered. It takes knowledge, industry, and skill to document that strong language so thoroughly with facts that no matter how much apoplexy The Ordeal Of Otto Otepka may produce in Foggy Bottom—or at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue for that matter—nobody is going to sue anybody and no charges are going to be brought on account of this book. The Establishment certainly does not want William J. Gill to get on a witness stand and say under oath what he here says in salty reporter's prose.

The elements of the Otepka case can be summarised as follows:

1. Otto Otepka, a lifelong civil servant who holds a law degree, rose from being an investigator in the Civil Service Commission in 1942 to top advisor on loyalty cases for that Commission, from which he was recruited into the State Department by the late Scott McLeod, who in 1961 called Otepka "the best [security] evaluator in government today". For the last four years of the Eisenhower Administration Otepka was Deputy Director of State's Office of Security.

2. Immediately upon the selection of Dean Rusk to be Secretary of State, and before he actually took office with the

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THE SOCIAL CREDIT SECRETARIAT

FROM WEEK TO WEEK

In our issue of Aug. 14, 1965 we quoted from the Allen-Scott Report of the Labour Conference held in Hanoi from June 2-6 of that year. The Conference was in fact a carefully prepared briefing operation to Communist Party operatives throughout the world: “Nothing was left to the imagination of the 600 delegates. Country by country they were briefed on how to implement the ‘vigorous aid Viet Nam and Rhodesia too produces paranoia, as an article in the Times (Nov. 13, 1969) reports. The Group Captain, used the “whole weight of our authority to stop the fighting”, for we are after all “the father of Nigerias”. Starvation could be stopped, he adds, if the armed forces were to deliver by day the prepacked food which the Prime Minister “said is awaiting transport”. In other words, a man who knows the position by personal investigation believes that text and negotiation are possible, but the British Government will not have it.

Rhodesia too produces paranoia, as an article in Human Events (Oct. 18, 1969) by Rep. Thomas Pelly demonstrates. He heard, he says, from the Department of State, that it would be “inconsistent” with obligations under the U.N. Charter to trade with Southern Rhodesia. He points to a more glaring “inconsistency”, namely the purchase of arms from the Soviet Union at $48.00 a ton. The Rhodesian price was $31.35 a ton. While Russia supplies 80 per cent of the equipment used in Viet Nam to kill Americans, Rhodesia “has never been responsible for the death of one U.S. citizen”. Meanwhile the flagships of the United Kingdom carry materials to North Viet Nam “during the time of a tragic and trying conflict”. As for a racial issue, he mentions the “violent anti-Jewish policies” of Russia. The Bishop of Matabeleland, a harsh critic of Mr. Smith, admits the “violent anti-Jewish policies” of Russia. The Bishop of Matabeleland, a harsh critic of Mr. Smith, admits that peace and negotiation are possible, but the British Government will not have it.

And then we read of the reactions to those who defended the right to watch a game of football with the Springboks. A leader of the demonstrators called them “rhubarb thugs” and accused them of “brutal mob violence”. Civil demonstrators have perfected the technique of provoking people to violent acts. Mr. John Lee, M.P. for Reading, called for an “investigation” into the conduct of the police, several of whom, incidentally, were injured in doing their duty. Mr. Hugh Jenkins, M.P. for Putney, asked for a Home Office enquiry “to see whether the rest of the tour should be called off”. I cannot see how the caving in by the forces of law and order to a small minority of demonstrators could possibly be called...
democratic'. But William Edwards, Merioneth M.P., complains of the "ferocity" of the police measures. Lawless measures by a band of demonstraters naturally meet with a robust response, and rugby vigilantes are probably as robust as any. In fact, The Daily Telegraph (Nov. 7, 1969) from which these reports are taken, warns against the result of these demonstrations, for they "diminish democracy and do not enhance it . . . those who sow the wind may reap the whirlwind".  

—H.S.

Sign Sign-in in Another Tax?

While the World Council of Churches plans a meeting in Geneva next January to discuss "development aid" (Church Times, Nov. 7, 1969), Lord Hawke dealt ably at the Church Assembly with a proposal to make a token offering for "the developing nations". (Church Times, Nov. 14, 1969.) He warned that if the members were to ask people if they were prepared to be taxed more heavily "in order to provide handouts to underdeveloped countries", they would meet a very hostile reception. For people were conscious of the "irresponsible policies" of these countries once they became independent and resented the way in which they had "ganged up" against Britain in the United Nations. The present contribution moreover had "a negligible effect on the disparity between the rich and poor countries of the world".

I believe the question of tax to be important, for as the Rev. Maurice Garton pointed out (The Times, Nov. 12, 1969), all who take part in the proposed "sign-in" should realise that they will either have to pay higher taxes "or reduce Government expenditure on other objects". (And a higher tax limits the freedom to spend responsibly or indeed to give.)

The Bishop of Durham, Dr. Ramsey, spoke at the Church Assembly in support of giving on the spot and mentioned the "injustice of the plight of the under-developed countries" adding that the imbalance between richer and poorer countries "was the greatest threat to the peace of the world". Yesterday it was the racial problems. But the real problem of richer and poorer—etc., is one of competence. I suppose Canada was pitifully "under-developed" until the French and British arrived, also New Zealand, and such parts of Africa as thrive owe their stability to the competent settlers and their descendants who have stayed there: while the plight of other African territories may be attributed to a racial prejudice that expels the competent and harasses them in other countries through encouraging terrorists. We may say that they have been unjust to themselves, but a hand-out will only encourage this injustice or divert it to tribal lines.

Responsibility may of course be instilled or encouraged in other parts of the world, but the attitude to Europeans in Africa suggests that competence or justice have little to do with the "sign-in". Lincoin observed that you cannot further the brotherhood of man "by encouraging class hatred" or help the wage-earner "by pulling down the wage-payer", and discouraged indiscriminate interference.

The white man brought with him order, peace and some prosperity to those countries, and these benefits largely departed with him. He may still be able to help marginally, if not taxied out of existence, but in Africa, for instance, the best hope comes from the more sensible attitude towards South Africa of Ghana and Madagascar, as well as of Malawi. Arrivals elsewhere have provoked a different response, as is evident from the tragic refugee camps in the Middle East, but I do not imagine that the Bishop of Durham had these sufferers in mind when he spoke of injustice. And I wonder how clear his conscience is over Biafra.

Perhaps it is a measure of socialist demoralisation that people can imagine that an extra tax or a collection would achieve anything while these grave problems remain unsolved and the menace of communism increases.  

—H.S.

The Ordeal of Otto Otepka

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inauguration of John Kennedy, he asked Otepka's judgment as a security officer on the eligibility of Walt Rostow for clearance to take a top job in the State Department. Otepka, who was already familiar with Doctor Rostow's file, pointed out that such clearance could not legally be granted under the terms of Executive Order 10450 (which required that doubts be resolved in favor of the country rather than the applicant), and not without a full F.B.I. investigation even if E.O. 10450 were rescinded. Present when Otepka gave Rusk this opinion in December 1960 was Attorney-General-to-be Robert Kennedy, who was obviously exasperated by the judgment, as quite evidently was Rusk also, though the latter was more circumspect in revealing his attitude.

3. Throughout the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations Otepka was at cross purposes with Rusk and officials intermediate between the two of them in the "chain of command"—such as the William J. Crockett already mentioned; such as John Francis Beilby, head of State's Office of Security; and, from time to time, others. All these took it for granted that a security evaluator's purpose was to tell the big brass what they wanted to hear and to rubber-stamp any appointments that might come down from on high. Otepka, on the other hand, was singularly literal-minded in adhering to the principle that he had taken an oath to uphold the Constitution and laws of the country, and that his first duty as an evaluator of files was, as any umpire should do, to call 'em as he saw 'em. You get the impression that the man really is stubborn, and that of course is just what we need on our side.

4. In spite of the fact that ways could be found to get around Otepka's bull-headed patriotism and sense of duty, the security officer became more and more a thorn in the flesh of the outriders of Camelot, particularly Rusk, Bob Kennedy, and Rostow.

Oh yes, Rostow, of course, got into the Department.

He was first cleared by Presidential order into the White House and then sent down to State over the head of Otepka and other security zealots there, if any. (There were a few, under Otepka. They got it when he did.) Later Rostow went back to the White House, succeeding McGeorge Bundy as Special Assistant to the President for National Security.
Affairs—"the most important job in the White House, aside from the President", as Lyndon once put it, with characteristic conceit. (Nixon is conceited too; he thinks he is more important than Rostow's successor, Henry Kissinger.)

Imagine the top Presidential advisor on national security being a man who can't honestly be cleared by regular security procedures! Otepka could hardly imagine such a thing, but he didn't have to. There it was in the flesh.

Well, it was not comfortably to have in government anybody who knew as much about Rostow as Otepka knew, and who had such a "Neanderthal" attitude about security. Rusk and company set out to get Otepka. It wasn't easy. He had Civil Service status, you know, and was a lawyer himself; besides when the going got really rough he hired Roger Robb, the crack attorney who made the case against Julius Robert Oppenheimer. In the end, however, they got him—framed him on charges of giving confidential information to—guess who—the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. Terrible! Now if it had been the Soviet Embassy.

Actually, Otepka was technically in the clear all 'round, and in the spirit of the law as distinct from the letter, was more than in the clear. He was a national hero—a reluctant hero, because a lifetime of service in the bureaucracy had conditioned him to want to play ball with his organizational superiors. But he couldn't play ball if his bosses were violating the rules and throwing the game to the opposition.

In the course of his struggle to save his career, which came to a climax in the last years of the Johnson Administration, Otto Otepka naturally attracted the attention not only of patriots but also of politicians who had reason to profess dissatisfaction with Lyndon and his top Cabinet officer, Dean Rusk. Richard Nixon, made campaign promises about saving Otepka, and his top Cabinet officer, Dean Rusk.

No one can say that Nixon himself double-crossed Thurmond about Otepka or that he double-crossed Otepka. After all, he did appoint him to head the Subversive Activities Control Board, at a considerably better salary than Otepka had ever made before. That was not, however, the job Otepka wanted, or that Thurmond wanted him to have. They wanted Otepka to be given a chance to clean up the State Department.

The difference in money could not have consoled Otto Otepka for failure to get reinstated at State (he should have been significantly promoted); the record is clear that Otepka, though prudent, is the least mercenary of men. The fact is that S.A.C.B. is an empty shell of an agency. Otepka, $36,000 per annum or no, is a victim of that particular shell game.

Okay, so who pulled off this nutty trick. They say William Rogers doesn't really have all that much power. "They" don't always know what they are talking about. Then again, sometimes they do. They also say, you know, that Henry Kissinger does have plenty of power—resident political intellectual plenipotentiary. It's hard to tell about Bill Rogers, but as a rule a cosmopolitan guy like Henry Kissinger absolutely can't abide a chauvinist like Otto Otepka.

Look, I didn't mean to tell the story. I don't summarize books. You know that. But a man gets carried away. I want you to know something, starting right now, about this Otepka case. You still don't know much compared to what there is in Gill's storehouse of information. Dig in. Let's promote this one. True, the book is not perfect. I could point out errors, including typos, including some worse than typos. Example: Gill says that Owen Lattimore's book Ordeal By Slender (which he correctly points out Abe Fortas helped write) was directed against the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. Actually it was written against Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, and was a subject of interrogation when Lattimore later appeared before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. I mention errors in Gill's book only to show I read every word of it—and, of course, to show off—but really the errors are negligible.

A final confession. I am prejudiced in favor of Gill's book because his emphasis on Rusk, Rostow, and Bobby Kennedy (nor does he neglect Robert McNamara, Abe Fortas, and Nick Katzenbach) so strongly supports my own thesis in The Usurpers. In many ways I think The Ordeal Of Otto Otepka is better than The Usurpers. Now write and tell me you disagree. I'd love to hear it. Let's get an argument going as to which book—and other entries in the contest—are welcome—more effectively exposes the "end-of-nationhood" apparatus in Washington. The prize you win may be your country. But to enter the contest you must read The Ordeal Of Otto Otepka.

—MEDFORD EVANS.