Correspondence

Henry Wallace

To the Editor: Joseph Capalbo's review of my book, The Rise and Fall of the People's Century, Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941-1948, in the June, 1974, issue of Worldview omits important qualifying statements in my analysis, and as a result simplifies and exaggerates my treatment of both liberalism and Wallace. While, for example, I criticize liberalism and Wallace from a socialist perspective, Capalbo's contention (which he implies I ignore) that "the struggle of the late 1940's was to define what liberalism meant" is a major thesis of my book, and one that I work out at great length in chapters 6-8. Secondly, I argue that social liberalism (as against the corporate variety) failed on its own terms, not in regard to any ideal socialist standard. Thus I contend that the New Deal did not overcome the Depression short of war, and that the national political majority that the New Deal created was, with the institutionalization of the war economy, channeled into narrow interest group politics and conservative trade unionism.

Wallace, I maintain (and this holds for his supporters), "had the courage of his very contradictory convictions and fought [in the early postwar period] against men who offered the nation something far worse." My major points are that the inner contradictions within the varieties of American liberalism, Wallace's own substantial flaws as a political leader, the objective conditions within the domestic political arena, and above all the effects of the war upon American capitalism made it virtually impossible for Wallace, and the groups that supported him for peace and reform to make an effective struggle against the cold war and the national anti-Communist consensus.

Furthermore, Capalbo's argument that "to lump Wallace and Truman together because they were not socialists does a disservice to Wallace" would be true if I really did that. Rather, one of my major theses is that the "Century of the Common Man" program that Wallace advocated during and after the war was "fundamentally different" from the "American Century" program of imperialist expansion and domestic reaction that largely triumphed under Truman. (I also, at some length, contrast the difference between Roosevelt and Truman.) In a footnote that has been widely quoted in reviews I state that "Wallace's commitment to capitalism as a system made him ultimately ineffective. To say that it made him indistinguishable from those who crushed him is to make a mockery of history."

Actually, most of the points Capalbo makes in defense of Wallace and in criticism of Truman (the role of "personality," the blunderings of Truman and his cronies, the definitions of social and corporate liberalism) are made in my book. Capalbo's comment, therefore, that "Whatever disappointment the Left has with liberals or liberalism, it is also a disappointment with America and Americans" I find both insulting and incredible. America is neither liberalism nor capitalism. To say that its culture and its people are completely indistinguishable from its economic system and its ruling class is, I believe, to take a very superficial view of history.

Capalbo concludes that "Henry Wallace is depicted by Markowitz as a deluded liberal who, by the end of his life, became a sad and pathetic figure recanting all he had earlier believed." While this is true to a considerable extent, I also argue that there was and is much that is vital in the "Century of the Common Man" program that Wallace articulated in the 1940's. But in spite of the contemporary atmosphere of détente, I doubt that it can be achieved within the context of present-day American capitalism or through the development of the largely utopian "progressive capitalism" that Wallace envisaged. Rather, I think that its future (if it is to have one) lies in the struggle for socialism in America, in the union of "incremental" reforms with the development of economic and political power within America's diverse working class. To say that, however, is not to denigrate Wallace or the struggle he made, but rather to understand its limitations. Eventually, I believe, Wallace may come to be seen as a kind of American Robert Owen, possessed of great strengths and great flaws, and worthy of critical respect from all those who would build an egalitarian and cooperative society in America.

Norman Markowitz
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On the Matter of Sir Herbert's Anarchism

To the Editors: I belatedly came across a review by Benjamin Barber of Sir Herbert Read's Anarchy and Order in the March, 1972, edition of Worldview. The inaccuracy of the review, and Mr. Barber's distorted presentation of Sir Herbert's thought, compel me to respond, albeit briefly, in an attempt to defend this man, the neglect of whose anarchist philosophy is partly due to unfavorable treatment by critics such as Mr. Barber. I do hope that the following will serve both to indicate the viability of Sir Herbert's anarchism and to point out Mr. Barber's failure to portray the thrust of Read's social thought properly.

1. To begin with, let one fact be set straight. Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics was published by Faber and Faber in 1954 and by Beacon Press, with Howard Zinn's introduction, in 1971. Neither of these publishing dates is seventeen years after the author's death, as Mr. Barber states, for Sir Herbert died in the summer of 1968.

2. Mr. Barber claims that Read's pacifism is of little relevance to the rabidly ideological total wars of recent times, and that because Read's (continued on p. 67)
vigorous role as the exponent of revolu-
tional nonviolent love. What
may be lacking in the sharpness of
Brown's critique is more than made
up for by his sympathy in under-
standing the internal logic of opposing
viewpoints.

Christian Asceticism
by J. A. Ziesler
(Eerdmans; 118 pp.; $2.25 [paper])

In view of the resource limitations
of the planet, there has been in
recent years a good deal of discus-
sion about reviving asceticism. For
those unfamiliar with the ascetical
tradition in Christianity this little
paperback might be a good place
to begin thinking about some of the
ambiguities and very practical pos-
sibilities in discovering that less can
be more.

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(from p. 2)

position is argued from the perspec-
tive of World War I it carries little
pertinence or plausibility. Read's
point of view is characterized as
"archaic." It should be noted, con-
trary to the impression left by Mr.
Barber, that all but one of the six
essays that comprise the text were
written subsequent to the outbreak
of the Second World War. However,
the date of authorship is not under
dispute, but rather the continuing
relevancy of the substance of Read's
work. The closing essay, "Chains
of Freedom," perhaps the most spec-
ulative of all Sir Herbert's political
writings, touches upon virtually
every major theme that has been
with social philosophy since Plato,
and Read's social criticism is as
strong here as anywhere. He fore-
shadows and paraphrases the con-
temporary criticism of Herbert
Marcuse when he writes that "the
most mentally enslaved people in
the world today are the uniform citi-
zens of a democratic republic like
America."

3. Mr. Barber misrepresents a very
key aspect of Read's anarchism
in stating that Read is attracted to
anarchism "precisely because he as-
sumes that men are naturally com-
munal," and that Read "takes a view
of human nature so benign and
promising as to make evil and suffer-
ing seem impossible except as prod-
ucts of accidents or ignorance." On
page 43 of Anarchy and Order Read
explicitly states that his anarchism
is not based on an assumption of
the natural goodness of human na-
ture. Read's anarchism is founded
upon a certain view of the natural
world and of man's relationship to
the natural world—two central con-
cerns of Read's which Barber does
not discuss.

4. Mr. Barber, perhaps partly due
to an ignorance of Read's total cor-
cus, misconstrues Sir Herbert's con-
cern with the relation of art to
society. Anarchy and Order is said
to constitute an attempt to integrate
the artist and society, which, accord-
ing to Mr. Barber, would result in
the perversion of both. But this is
not Sir Herbert's concern. His con-
cern is to make evident the need
for a social ordering which does not
conflict with individual sensibilities.
In his autobiographical work, The
Contrary Experience, Read said:
"Anarchism asserts—it is its only as-
sertion—that life must be so ordered
that the individual can live a natural
life, 'attending to what is within'
. . .". Read does not primarily seek
"artistic freedom," as Mr. Barber
says, but human freedom. And the
role which art plays in human free-
dom—the theme which synthesizes
Read's diverse writings—is not touch-
down upon by Mr. Barber.

5. Finally, Mr. Barber attempts to
 liken Sir Herbert's anarchism to lib-
 eralism in the respect that they both
equate politics with power, and
power with evil. But whereas the
liberal accepts the necessity of poli-
tics and tries to minimize the abuse
of power, the anarchist wants to do
away with politics and thereby with
power. What Mr. Barber is getting
at is that Read's anarchism is a stub-
born liberalism carried to a point
of extremity and coupled with a
more optimistic view of man. This is
an inaccurate assessment of Read's
anarchism, as it is an inaccurate as-
essment of anarchism in general.

(A survey-type essay by William D.
Reichert is helpful on this point. See
Ethics, January, 1969.) The inac-
curacy of Mr. Barber's account can
be seen if attention is given, not to
the way in which Sir Herbert's at-
titude toward political power is a
variation of the liberal position, but
to the underlying consideration
which Read gives to man's relation-
ship with nature. The problem of
individual liberty, the solution to
which finds liberalism ushering in
one theory of government or another,
is of secondary importance to Read.
The more fundamental problem has
to do with individual aesthetic sensi-
bilities. It is Read's awareness of
this problem that leads him, in
"Poetry and Anarchism," to equate
our lack of aesthetic sense with our
lack of social freedom, and the cause
of the arts with the cause of revolu-

While desiring to wholly renounce
Mr. Barber's treatment of Sir Her-
bert, I would not wish to boost Read
onto a pedestal of irreproachability.
Sir Herbert certainly has his weak
points: His reliance on organic meta-
phors is the most obvious, but his
critique of Marxism by way of Rus-
sian communism is also very trou-
bling. Anarchy and Order is an in-
delibly marked product of the mid-
twentieth century, yet one of the
critic's tasks should be to extract
what is of lasting value in a work.
Mr. Barber fails to do this, and,
what is worse, he leads one to be-
lieve that there is little of lasting
value in Read's work to be extracted.

Alan Waters
Colgate University
Hamilton, N.Y.

Mr. Barber originally wrote: "No
one ought then to be surprised to
discover that Read's Essays in Poli-
tsics (published here for the first time
under the title Anarchy and Order,
seventeen years after their original
English publication and three years
after the author's death) . . . . A
line dropped out of the galleys as
we went to press. Our apologies to
Mr. Barber—and to Mr. Waters, who
was misled by the printer's error.

-The Editors