

in the movement of Marxist dissidents founded by the American followers of Leon Trotsky.

The history of the modern conservative movement in America is really the history of two movements. The Old Right, the original Right, was nationalist, populist, and fundamentally libertarian. The cold war Right, dominated in large part by ex-leftist converts to conservatism, was militantly internationalist, increasingly elitist, and largely indifferent to free market economics—indeed, to virtually everything but the crusade against Communism.⁶ Starting out at opposite ends of the political spectrum, these two movements eventually came to meet and merge. The end result of this long process, which began in the mid-fifties and was completed by the time the eighties rolled around, was the transformation and betrayal of the American Right. What was betrayed, and by whom, is the theme and substance of this book.

James Burnham: From Trotsky to Machiavelli

"In a lifetime of political writing, James Burnham [showed] only one fleeting bit of positive interest in individual liberty; and that was a call in National Review for the legalization of firecrackers!"
—Murray N. Rothbard
The Betrayal of the American Right, 1970

The intellectual crisis of socialism preceded the political and military collapse of the socialist bloc by more than fifty years. Ever since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Left has suffered numerous setbacks—the Moscow Trials, the Hungarian revolt, the revelations of Stalin's crimes—each one setting off a wave of defectors. Over the years, the intellectuals among them have coalesced into a potent ideological force. What characterizes this otherwise diverse fraternity is that, for the most part, they started out in the Third International, and wound up in the camp of Ronald Reagan via the Fourth—the Fourth International, that is, stillborn rival to Stalin's Comintern, founded by Leon Trotsky after his expulsion from the Soviet Union. Trotsky's schismatic sect never achieved a mass following, and went into decline after his assassination in 1940 by a Stalinist agent. For a brief moment during the thirties, however, Trotskyism was a fad that swept through the radical intelligentsia of Manhattan and environs and corralled quite a few.¹

By taking refuge in the doctrines of Trotsky, who taught that the Russian party had been taken over by a "bureaucratic caste," these leftist intellectuals could hold on to their core beliefs even as the Moscow trials were going on. The Revolution, said Trotsky, had been betrayed, and the only thing left to

do was to build a new International, reclaim the banner of authentic Communism, and overthrow the bureaucrats so that true socialism could be unleashed. The Trotskyists made a great show of denouncing the Stalinist terror, rightly claiming that hundreds of thousands went into Stalin's prisons and never came out. What they neglected to say was that Trotsky's policy, had he won, would have been no less bloodthirsty. The only difference was that he would have chosen different victims, and, perhaps, executed them at a more leisurely pace.

Those who still retained their faith in socialism, but were profoundly affected by the sight of the purges and the show trials, were naturally attracted to the Trotskyist movement. Trotsky's problem, however, was that while he insisted on the distinction between anti-Stalinism and anti-Sovietism, in practice these two were often blurred. In an important sense, the Fourth International became a kind of halfway house between Communism and reconciliation with bourgeois society. A whole bevy of intellectuals in retreat from Communism parked themselves in the Trotskyist organization for some months or years at a time. Long after abandoning Marxism and socialism, these types retained their Stalinhobia. Their fixation intensified with the years, the one constant encompassing careers that started out in the Trotskyist youth group and ended up in the conservative movement.

Intellectual defectors from Communism have always played a key role in the modern conservative movement. Up until the Great Revolution of 1989, there was always a spot on the right-wing lecture circuit for ex-Communists, who enthralled conservative audiences with lurid tales of internal subversion directed by Kremlin masterminds. Benjamin Gitlow, a top leader of the Communist Party from its founding, was one of the first to go that route, and was followed by many others, a great number of whom eventually found themselves on the staff of the *National Review*. Whittaker Chambers was one; Frank S. Meyer, the conservative polemicist and theoretician of "fusionism," was another. Freda Ufley and Eugene Lyons, both ex-Communists, were also on the NR staff at its birth, along with ex-leftists Max Eastman, and Ralph de Toledano. These, then, were the precursors of today's neoconservatives, who made careers out of destroying what they had once fought to build, and whose lifelong obsession colored the modern conservative movement in its formative years.

But there are some striking differences, as well as obvious similarities, between these disparate figures. The ex-Stalinists, who came directly into the anti-Communist movement from the Kremlin-loyal Communist Party, such

of an idiosyncratic sort. Meyer, once a top Communist official, was the progenitor of the old "fusionist" school of conservative thought, which sought to fuse the best features of conservatism and libertarianism.

On the other hand, the great majority of those who came in from the anti-Stalinist Left, usually one sort of Trotskyist or another, were an altogether different breed. They retained more of their old allegiances and stubbornly resisted rejecting the central moral and political premises of collectivism. The conversion of the ex-Trotskyist intellectuals to the conservative cause was—with a single important exception—a long process extended over many years. Instead of jumping over to the other side of the political spectrum, this group of mostly New York-based intellectuals—such as Max Shachtman, who was one of the three original founders of the American Trotskyist movement—slowly worked themselves over from the far Left, sidling up to the Social Democracy, then worrying their way into the Democratic Party. By the time the sixties came around, Shachtman was supporting the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Vietnam war. His ex-comrades on the left contemptuously dismissed him as a "State Department socialist," but his commitment to socialism never truly dimmed, although it was radically modified.

THE TROTSKYIST PHASE

The key to understanding the motive power behind the Long March of the neoconservatives from one end of the political spectrum to the other is to be found in an obscure but pivotal event. On September 5, 1939, at a meeting of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party, the Trotskyist party in the U.S., James Burnham and Max Shachtman began a factional struggle against Trotsky and the party leadership that was to end, less than a year later, in a split. This mini-event was set off by a big event, namely the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the opening shots of World War II.

On the eve of the war, the American Trotskyists, considered somewhat fashionable up until that point, suddenly found themselves in a difficult position. Although they had always enjoyed the advantages of being considered "idealists," Communists who nonetheless could afford the luxury of denouncing the crimes of Stalin, there was a hitch with the Hitler-Stalin Pact: Trotsky stubbornly insisted that the Soviet Union must be defended, "against the Stalinists and in spite of the Stalinists."

As the Soviets, in league with the Nazis, attacked Poland, Finland, and gobbled up the Baltic states, being a Trotskyist was no longer as attractive

The intellectuals recruited in bulk at the height of the Moscow Trials defected in droves. Most notable and visible of these was James Burnham, a top Trotskyist leader and theoretician, who taught philosophy at New York University and was to become one of the most influential figures of the American Right, the great-grandfather of today's neoconservatives.

When Burnham, as a member of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee, rose to challenge Trotsky, he set off a factional explosion, the momentum of which eventually hurled him and his circle to the other end of the political spectrum. From Trotskyism to Reaganism is a long way to travel; the "Big Bang" that sent them on their way was World War II. "It is impossible to regard the Soviet Union as a workers' state in any sense whatever," declared Burnham at that fateful meeting. "Soviet intervention [in World War II] will be wholly subordinated to the general imperialist character of the conflict as a whole and will be in no sense a defense of the remains of the Soviet economy."

The orthodox Trotskyists, led by James P. Cannon and energetically supported by Trotsky, argued that the Fourth International had always defended the USSR against the threat of capitalist restoration, and they saw no reason to change course. The Soviet Union, though degenerated, was still a "workers state": the "gains of October," though besmirched and endangered by the Stalinists, were still essentially intact and must be defended.

Burnham had come into the Trotskyist movement via A. J. Muste's American Workers Party, which fused with the Trotskyist organization (then known as the Communist League of America) in December of 1934. As a leader of the AWP, Burnham was coopted onto the National Committee of the new organization and absorbed into the Trotskyist movement. As a leading figure in the anti-Stalinist left, a respected intellectual who often graced the pages of *Partisan Review*, the avant-garde literary journal of modernist Marxism, Burnham was an important acquisition for the Trotskyists.

He was a loyal member of the Fourth International from 1934 until the winter of 1939-40, and in that time he rose to occupy an important place, especially in the New York organization. For five years, he went along with the twists and turns of the Trotskyist leadership, entering the Socialist Party in 1936, when the Trots conducted a factional "raid" on the party of Norman Thomas. Burnham then dutifully joined the SWP when they reconstituted under their own banner in 1937. He was willing to play ball with the Socialist Workers Party, as long as it looked like Trotskyism might be the coming thing; that is, until the outbreak of World War II.

The irony is that, less than a year before, Burnham and Shachtman had co-authored an attack on former fellow-traveling intellectuals such as Sidney Hook, Eugene Lyons, and Max Eastman for the party theoretical magazine, *New International*, entitled "Intellectuals in Retreat," and foretelling their own apostasy with preternatural accuracy. The article ridiculed what it called the "League of Abandoned Hopes" as hopelessly flighty *petit-bourgeois* intellectuals, fly-by-night operators who had abandoned the USSR in its darkest hour. In describing the Eastman-Lyons-Hook pattern, they foreshadowed their own. At first, the apostates deny their renegacy, by bringing up essentially peripheral arguments, such as the validity of dialectical materialism and abstract quibbles about "democracy" and "freedom"—which, of course, the authors dismissed out of hand. But all of this is irrelevant, said Burnham and Shachtman during their orthodox phase, because what it really comes down to is the Soviet Union, the "Russian question." The "main intellectual disease from which these intellectuals suffer may be called Stalinophobia, or vulgar anti-Stalinism," they wrote. This affliction was generated "by the universal revulsion against Stalin's macabre system of frame-ups and purges. And the result has been less a product of cold social analysis than of mental shock; where there is analysis, it is moral rather than scientific and political."²

Nine months later came the shock of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. The two main currents of socialism, National Socialism and international Communism, merged into a military and political alliance, and suddenly the macabre specter of "Communazism" was looming over the rubble that was Europe. Under the impact of these events, Burnham and Shachtman took out a joint membership in what they had once mockingly referred to as the "League of Abandoned Hopes," with Burnham as chief theoretician and Shachtman as his attorney and chief factotum. They refused to defend the Soviet Union in this war or any other because, they said, it had degenerated into a phenomenon that had become indistinguishable from Hitlerism: into a new form of class society which they called "bureaucratic collectivism," competing with capitalism for control of the world.³

As the Red Army rolled into Poland, crushed the Baltics, and attacked neutral Finland, it was obvious to the Burnham-Shachtman group—about forty percent of the SWP membership, including most of the intellectuals and virtually all of the youth—that the military alliance of the two totalitarian powers was more than just an alliance of convenience. A certain ideological affinity was at work here, and

Up until the U.S. entry into the war, this view of the Soviet Union in left-wing circles had been confined to a few "ultra-lefts," the anarcho-syndicalists, the followers of the German theorist Karl Korsch, and the Italian Bordighists, who contended that the Soviet Union had reverted to capitalism. This theory had only a small following, and understandably so. As Stalin "liquidated" the kulaks and all vestiges of private property and liberalism, it was difficult to argue that capitalism was being reborn. However, the Shachtman-Burnham faction had come up with a new variation of the old "ultra-left" argument, which combined the Trotskyist theory of the Kremlin oligarchy as a caste of Stalinist Brahmins with Burnham's innovation: The bureaucracy, he claimed, represented a new class based not on private property but on collectivized property forms.

This challenge to party orthodoxy upset the orthodox Trotskyists and outraged Trotsky himself, who was sitting in his fortified compound in Coyoacan, Mexico, embattled and nearing the end of his long struggle to build the phantom "Fourth International." There had already been a few attempts on the old revolutionary's life, and soon a Stalinist *agent provocateur* would succeed where the others had failed. It was the last battle of Trotsky's life, and he attacked Burnham as if he knew it. In several open letters the old revolutionary declared his contempt for the bourgeois professor, who dared question the mystic dogma of dialectical materialism. "Educated witch-dog" was among the more temperate epithets hurled from Coyoacan.

Nor did Burnham restrain himself. His answer to the founder of the Red Army, "Science and Style," marked his break with the Marxist movement.⁴ In this article, he exhibited all of the symptoms of the "disease" he had warned readers of the party theoretical magazine against: disbelief in the dialectic and a "Stalinophobia" that equated the Soviet regime with Hitler's Germany. Although at the time he protested that "It is false that we reject Marxian sociology," soon he would reject Marxism completely.

THE THEORY OF THE MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION

A mere three months after penning "Science and Style," having just spoken from the platform of the new party he had helped to organize with Shachtman, Burnham dropped off his letter of resignation with the secretary at the Workers Party headquarters. "The faction fight in the Socialist Workers Party, its conclusion, and the recent formation of the Workers Party have been in my own case the unavoidable occasion for the review of my own theoretical and political beliefs," he wrote. "This review has shown me that

by no stretching of terminology can I any longer regard myself, or permit others to regard me, as a Marxist." Marxism could no longer contain the limits of Burnham's evolving world-view. "Not only do I believe it is meaningless to say that 'socialism is inevitable' and false that socialism is 'the only alternative to capitalism'; I consider that on the basis of the evidence now available to us a new form of exploitive society (what I call 'managerial society') is not only possible as an alternative to capitalism but is a more probable outcome of the present period than socialism."⁵

This is the origin of the theme and title of Burnham's famous book, *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), in which he propounded his view that a new form of class society, spearheaded by a new elite, was virtually unstoppable. According to Burnham, the new ruling elite is made up of administrators, technicians, scientists, bureaucrats, and the myriad middlemen who have taken the means of production out of the hands of the capitalists. This bloodless coup occurred by virtue of the fact that the managers administer and therefore have come to control the production process. "In the earlier days of capitalism," we are told, "the typical capitalist, the ideal of the ideologists before and after Adam Smith, was himself his own manager so far as there were managerial functions." But all this was ended by "the growth of large-scale public corporations along with the technological development of modern industry," which has "virtually wiped such types of enterprise out of the important sections of the economy," "except for marginal 'small businesses' which are trivial in their historical influence."⁶

Burnham's understanding of entrepreneurship, and how markets develop, although somewhat improved after he became a conservative, never really went too far beyond this crude analysis. Perhaps we ought not to hold it against the author of *The Managerial Revolution* that he failed to foresee the influence of such companies as Apple Computer. Yet his book is in fact a whole series of very specific predictions, most of which turned out to be wrong.

Burnham's essential insight—that the war would accelerate a worldwide statist trend in Europe and in the United States—is a theme that ran through much political writing at the time. On the Left, Bruno Rizzi and Rudolf Hilferding were forerunners of Burnham; but this analysis was not limited to dissident Trotskyists. The same theme was expressed on the pre-war Right by such writers as John T. Flynn, who, like Rizzi, compared the New Deal to German National Socialism and Italian fascism.⁷ In the case of Burnham, some essential error blurred his vision of the future, and so distorted his sense of reality that he felt confident enough to predict the victory of Hitler over

Aside from a tendency to exaggerate everything, what blinded him was his understanding of politics as a "science," like physics or chemistry. This is the philosophical legacy of Marxist materialism, which Burnham never abandoned; he merely peeled off the Marxist veneer. What remained was the theory of 'managerial society,' which purported to be unconcerned about such trivialities as "whether the facts indicated by this theory are 'good' or 'bad,' just or unjust, desirable or undesirable—but simply with whether the theory is true or false on the basis of the evidence now at our disposal."⁸

Appropriating the language of science, Burnham identified managerial society with modernity. The rise to power of the new managerial class, he maintained, was necessitated by objective developments, namely the increasing complexity and scale of modern production and advancing technology. Throughout this work, and in his future writings, Burnham assumed the Olympian detachment of the objective seeker after truth. "I am not writing a program of social reform, nor am I making any moral judgment whatever on the subject with which I am dealing." To hear him tell it, Burnham is concerned only to "elaborate a *descriptive* theory able to explain the character of the present period of social transition and to predict, at least in general, its outcome."⁸

Writing during the latter half of 1940, Burnham predicted the triumph of the Thousand Year Reich, the postponement of the Russian-German confrontation until after Britain's inevitable defeat, and the imminent breakup of the Soviet Union. George Orwell, in his penetrating analysis of *The Managerial Revolution*, focused on the flaw in Burnham's method:

[A]t each point Burnham is predicting a continuation of anything that is happening. Now the tendency to do this is not simply a bad habit, like inaccuracy or exaggeration, which one can simply correct by taking thought. It is a major mental disease, and its roots lie partly in cowardice and partly in the worship of power, which is not fully separable from cowardice.⁹

In the cool tone of the dispassionate scientist, Professor Burnham described the efficiency of the Nazi form of managerialism in terms verging on admiration. "The Nazi success, year after year, can only be explained by the ever-increasing weakness of the capitalist structure of society." Out of the rotting remnants of decadent capitalism is born that harbinger of the managerial future, Nazi Germany. "Internally, Germany still remains in its early stage," wrote Burnham:

However, it was impossible to complete the internal revolution without at once going over to the more grandiose external tasks of the managerial

Germany, we might say, a head start over the other great powers in getting ready for the managerial world system.¹⁰

In the winter of 1940, when it looked as if Hitler would almost certainly conquer the whole of Europe, Burnham portrayed the Nazis as the agents of progress, and even defended them against charges of decadence:

There are many who call Nazi Germany decadent because its rulers lie a great deal, are treacherous, break treaties, exile, imprison, torture, and murder worthy human beings. . . . But it is not at all a fact that such actions are typical signs of decadence. . . . Indeed, if historical experience establishes any correlation in this matter, it is probably a negative one: that is, the young, new, rising social order is, as against the old, more likely to resort on a large scale to lies, terror, persecution.¹¹

Without once mentioning the doctrine of racialism throughout a long chapter on "The German Way," Burnham's ostensibly value-free description of Nazi managerialism is subverted by the undertone of adulation: "A rising social class and a new order of society have got to break through the old moral codes just as they must break through the old economic and political institutions. Naturally, from the point of view of the old, they are monsters. If they win, they take care in due time of manners and morals."¹²

Burnham's vision was anything but value free. As Orwell said: "Power worship blurs political judgement because it leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue. Whoever is winning at the moment will always seem to be invincible." This certainly seems to be a recurring theme in Burnham's career. When collectivism of the Left looked as if it might be winning, he was a Leninist; when Hitler was the master of Europe, he was awed into reverence for managerialism, Aryan-style; when the United States stood astride the postwar world, with a monopoly on nuclear weapons, he called on the Americans to set up a world empire.

Certain that totalitarianism, leader worship, and a regime of unrelenting cruelty were the wave of the future, Burnham wrote that

the [Allied] nations discover that they can compete in war with Germany only by going over more and more, not merely to the same military means that Germany uses, but to the same type of institutions and ideas that characterize German society. This somewhat ironic relation holds: the surest way, the only way, to defeat Germany would be for the opposing nations to go over, not merely to institutions and ideas similar to those of Germany, but still further along the managerial road than Germany has yet gone.¹³

While Burnham's prediction that the immediate postwar world would be dominated by Germany, Japan, and the United States, this miscalculation did not alter the basic thrust of his theory: that the world was witnessing the

victory of a new managerial class which had already taken power in the Soviet Union and, after the war, would be triumphant in the U.S. as well. For the U.S., in the aftermath of World War II, had indeed moved in the direction of Germany, albeit not to the extent imagined—or implicitly urged—by the author of *The Managerial Revolution*.

Burnham did not mourn the (alleged) death of capitalism. He had nothing but contempt for the American businessman, whom he saw as a greedy, short-sighted creature, richly deserving of imminent extinction. Even in the act of proposing to mount an all-out struggle against their mortal enemies, the Communists, Burnham could not help but sneer at the American capitalists, who can only

repeat the traditional capitalist symbolic ritual of "liberty," "free enterprise," "the American way," "opportunity," [and] "individual initiative." They repeat it sincerely, as their fathers repeated it before them. But the ritual has lost its meaning and its mass appeal. Before the centralizing, statizing power of the managerial revolution, the institutions of American society, the Constitution, the vision of the Founders, and the spirit of 1776 are swept away like so much litter.¹⁴

Burnham's power-worshipping mentality is epitomized in his subsequent book, *The Machiavellians: In Defense of Freedom*.¹⁵ "In *The Managerial Revolution*," writes Burnham, "I tried to summarize the general character of the revolution. I did so . . . primarily in institutional, especially in economic terms. I propose here to re-define the nature of the revolution through the use of the Machiavellian principles."¹⁶

In spite of its title, *The Machiavellians* indicates a softening of Burnham's position. While still heralding the implacable march into the managerial future, the author stopped to at least examine the fact that such a development bodes ill for human freedom. He admits that "it would be absurd to deny" how much advancing managerialism "darkens the prospects of freedom for our time. Nevertheless, I am not yet convinced that they are sufficient to make freedom impossible." Besides, we are told, "Freedom does require that all economic power should not be centralized, but there are other means than capitalist property rights to prevent such centralization." Despite this minor modification, the essential contours of the theory of the managerial society remain intact. In *The Machiavellians*, Burnham still projects a society that is neither socialist nor capitalist, and he attacks both the Marxists and the conservatives as purveyors of "myths that express, not movements for political liberty, but a contest for control over the despotic and Bonapartist

Here he steps out of his role as mere chronicler of the inevitable, to dispense advice to the new ruling elite:

There would seem to be no theoretic reason why sections of the elite should not be scientific about political affairs. If our reference is to the governing elite, we are asking whether rulers can rule scientifically; and the answer would seem to be that, up to a certain point, they can.¹⁸

Instead of denying that "the primary real goal of every ruling group is the maintenance of its own power and privilege," a truly scientific elite would "recognize it frankly, and take appropriate steps to insure power and privilege."¹⁹

Burnham's sudden defection from Marxism, and his subsequent odyssey that led him to join the staff of the leading journal of the anti-Communist Right, is not as inexplicable as it first appears. There is a continuity in his thought, a constant theme. Trotskyist communism posited a revolution betrayed and a parasitical ruling caste sprung from but also in conflict with collectivized property forms. Shachtman went a little farther down the same road and posed the question of whether the bureaucracy was in fact a new exploiting class; Burnham took the theory of bureaucratic collectivism still farther, positing a Machiavellian creed which denied all "utopias" and sought only to modify the behavior of the ruling managerial elite in a more "scientific" direction. Burnham's political trajectory, from revolution to reconciliation with the ruling class, in the space of less than five years, encapsulates the experience of a whole generation of ex-Leftists, who moved rightward more slowly but steadily during the fifties and were finally driven out of the Left completely in the sixties. Burnham was the first neoconservative, and the purest in the sense of being the most explicit and consistent.

NATIONAL REVIEW AND THE ANTI-COMMUNIST CRUSADE

After his break with the Workers Party, Burnham lingered for a short while in the ranks of those anti-Communist liberals who were associated with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and with the *Partisan Review* crowd. As long as he confined himself to a call for rolling back Communism and outlawing the American Communist Party, he was considered extreme but still within the bounds of rational discourse. The split with liberals such as James T. Farrell, Dwight MacDonald, and Daniel Bell, came over the issue of Joe McCarthy. Burnham did not openly come out for "Tail Censorship."

he attacked the Senator's leftist critics and defended the concept that governments have the right and even the duty to investigate internal subversion. In 1953, Burnham resigned from the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, the liberal anti-Communist front financed largely by the CIA, declaring that while he was not a McCarthyite, neither was he an "anti-anti-McCarthyite." Sentiment against Burnham had been building in the ACCF for months, and he had been under attack by some members who criticized him for writing the introduction to a book that accused American scientists of relaying secret information to the Soviet Union. Burnham replied that his critics had

failed so far to realize that they are, in political reality, in a united front with the Communists, in the broadest, most imposing united front that has ever been constructed in this country.²⁰

Isolated from the intellectual circles in which he had formerly flourished, Burnham retired to his home in Kent, Connecticut, to write a book for the *Reader's Digest*, defending the congressional investigation into Communist activities. When William F. Buckley, Jr. came to visit him in late 1954, Burnham welcomed the suggestion that he join the staff of a new conservative magazine. As Senior Editor at the *National Review* Burnham played a pivotal role, taking on a good deal of the day-to-day editorial tasks. For the next twenty-three years he was a decisive influence on what was to become the fountainhead of American conservatism.

In his *National Review* column "The Third World War," Burnham turned his elegant, angular prose to the task of outlining an unrelenting but ruthlessly realistic strategy for meeting the Communist challenge. The title of his column is taken from the opening of his 1947 polemic, *The Struggle for the World*,²¹ wherein he comes to grips with the errors of *The Managerial Revolution*, which were by that time quite glaring. The triumph of bipolar totalitarianism had been averted. Instead, the struggle for the world was reduced to two, the United States and the Soviet Union. The Third World War, as the logical outgrowth of the Second, had begun.

The Struggle for the World develops this contention into a full-blown justification for a U.S. world empire. Without mentioning his earlier prediction of a tripartite world of mega-states, Burnham presents two proposals for the postwar bipolar world: first, the merger of the United States and Great Britain, with the latter in a subordinate role, and second—incredibly—a preventive war against the Soviet Union.

The existence of nuclear weapons, and the unique nature of the Communist enemy, he argued, made it imperative for the U.S. to use its nuclear

monopoly to impose a "World Federation" on "at least enough of the world to dominate effectively the major questions of world politics." He freely admitted, however, that "[a] federation . . . in which the federated units are not equal, in which one of them leads all others, to however slight a degree, and holds the decisive instrument of material power, is in reality an empire." Naturally, the word "empire" will not be used, he says, but:

The reality is that the only alternative to the communist World Empire is an American Empire which will be, if not literally worldwide in formal boundaries, capable of exercising decisive world control. Nothing less than this can be the positive, or offensive, phase of a rational United States policy.²²

Before the clarion call for a "New World Order" was sounded in 1990 by a Republican President, there was Burnham's declaration that the U.S., in 1946, had two choices: a "world imperial federation with a monopoly of atomic weapons" or else another devastating world war that might destroy both superpowers.

Conspiracy theorists of the Right have traditionally blamed the Council on Foreign Relations for coming up with the "New World Order," but in fact it was Burnham who, with unusual prescience, first coined the phrase:

It will be useful to give a name to the supreme policy which I have formulated. It is neither "imperial" nor "American" in any sense that would be ordinarily communicated by these words. The partial leadership, which it allots to the U.S. follows not from any nationalist bias but from the nature and possibilities of existing world power relationships. Because this policy is the only answer to the communist plan for a universal totalitarianism, because it is the only chance for preserving the measure of liberty that is possible for us in our Time of Troubles, and because it proposes the sole route now open toward a free world society, I shall henceforth refer to it as the *policy of democratic world order*.²³

While Burnham's prediction that "a new war in the full sense, and in a comparatively short time, is very probable," was wrong, his insight that the United States might well embark on a quest for empire, or world domination, was uncannily accurate, right down to approximating the phrase employed by George Bush to describe the goal of U.S. foreign policy.

True, it is not quite a *democratic* world order—certainly the Emir of Kuwait does not qualify as a democrat—but that would have bothered Burnham as much as it apparently bothered the Bush Administration.

NEITHER CAPITALISM NOR SOCIALISM

The globalist ideologues who today tell us that we must establish a Pax Americana, by force of arms if need be, owe a great debt to James Burnham, who was the first to openly advocate their program for the post-cold war world. This debt was readily acknowledged by John O'Sullivan, the editor of *National Review*, who replaced Buckley in 1990. In a long paean to Burnham, published in the magazine's 35th anniversary issue, O'Sullivan was clearly looking for precedents for the new conservative globalism, searching for a theoretical peg on which to hang conservative support for the Iraq war, and hoping to find it in Burnham. "The best new world order we can reasonably hope for," declares O'Sullivan, at the end of his long, rambling essay,

is that the U.S. . . . may be persuaded to go beyond a narrow interpretation of its national interest. . . . America's position in such a system would be similar to that of a medieval king in a feudal society: the sole sovereign with a recognized monopoly of force, but reliant for levies of both troops and money upon powerful barons. . . . Such a system would not be perfect, but, as Burnham himself might have said, it would certainly be an improvement on the totalitarian Dark Ages from which we have only just emerged.²⁴

If this is the best new world order we can hope for, then perhaps we can do without. To compare the chief executive of the American republic to a medieval king is bad enough, to add dependence on a council of foreign barons would be obscene if it weren't so absurd.

O'Sullivan's program of British-style imperialism has limited appeal to Americans, whatever their political coloration. If American conservatives were going to have the "New World Order" shoved down their throats, then the editor of the *National Review* was determined to find some way to make it all go down smoothly. He had to discover some American precedent for a globalism of the Right, and certainly Burnham fit the bill.

O'Sullivan's attempt to resurrect Burnham's ghost, in defense of a globalist doctrine profoundly alien to American conservative thought, failed because Burnham, who believed neither in liberty nor transcendence, was no more a conservative than he was a Trotskyist, as anyone who skims through *The Managerial Revolution*, *The Machiavellians*, and even *The Struggle for the World* and some of the later works, will readily discover. Neither in his method, a crude form of mechanical materialism, nor in his politics, was James Burnham any sort of conservative, either traditionalist or libertarian.

As one who would bring "science" to politics, he had no use for transcendence. As for liberty, Murray Rothbard put it well in his unpublished manuscript, *The Betrayal of the American Right*. Discussing the strong authoritarian trend at *National Review*, Rothbard writes:

At the opposite pole from the Catholic ultras, but at one with them in being opposed to liberty and individualism, was James Burnham, who since the inception of *National Review* [was] its cold, hard-nosed, armoral political strategist and resident Machiavellian. . . . In a lifetime of political writing, James Burnham has shown only one fleeting bit of positive interest in individual liberty: and that was a call in *National Review* for the legalization of firecrackers!²⁵

Burnham's views were a constant source of conflict at *National Review*. In spite of the fact that the magazine had consistently mocked the policies of Dwight Eisenhower, in 1956 Burnham argued that NR ought to endorse him. In his biography of Buckley, John Judis quotes Neal Freeman as saying that in 1964, Burnham "had been subtly but persistently reminding the editorial board of the hidden virtues of Nelson Rockefeller."²⁶ In any conservative's book, the chapter entitled "The Hidden Virtues of Nelson Rockefeller" is going to be very short.

None of this seems to bother O'Sullivan, at least not much. Perhaps he assumes that most of his readers will not have read the books he cites, except, perhaps, for *The Suicide of the West*, a standard anti-Communist tract. Still, there is always the danger that his more inquisitive readers may have stumbled across *The Managerial Revolution* or will be impelled to pick it up on his recommendation. Thus he is forced to downplay the importance of the book as bearing "the marks both of Burnham's recent Marxism and of the period when it was written." To say that a book bears the mark of the period in which it is written is to tell us nothing, for surely every book bears this mark. As for the effects of the author's cast-off Marxism, this would make sense if *The Managerial Revolution* stood in contrast to his later works. But in fact they are all of one piece: *The Machiavellians*, *The Struggle for the World*, *The Coming Defeat of Communism*, and the rest. All are suffused with a single theme, and that is the supremacy of power.

O'Sullivan even falsely states that "Burnham therefore explicitly retracted his predictions of a new world order in *The Managerial Revolution*." Far from retracting the conclusions reached in that seminal work, Burnham merely modified and refined them over the years, as his preface to the 1960 Midland Books edition makes eminently clear. In spite of what he called a tendency to be overly "schematic," too "rigid and doctrinaire," he stood by his basic thesis. While allowing for the

property forms—though in a distinctly subordinate role—even at that late date he was able to write:

Throughout the world, indeed, informed and thoughtful men have come to a double realization: first, that the capitalist era, in anything like the traditional meaning . . . is drawing to a close, or may even be regarded as finished; but second, that it is not to be replaced by socialism. . . . If these two negative facts are accepted, there then remains a double positive task: from a theoretical standpoint, to analyze the precise nature of this present historic transition . . . [and] from a human and practical standpoint, to act in such a way as to promote those variants of the new order that permit us that minimum of liberty and justice without which human society is degraded to merely animal existence.²⁷

This was the essence of Burnham's view: If liberty were to exist at all, then it would have to be the bare minimum. In Burnham's malevolent universe, man's inevitable station in life is just a cut above slavery—and he had better learn to be grateful that he isn't totally at the mercy of his masters. In any case, Burnham assures us, the growth of state power is unavoidable, with the clear implication being that conservatives would be well-advised to abandon their futile efforts to stop it, and focus their energies on the real threat posed by Communism.

In *The Coming Defeat of Communism*, which was in effect a program for the implementation of the principles outlined in *The Struggle for the World*, Burnham bares his contempt for the American businessman.²⁸ Aside from being "ignorant, abysmally ignorant about what communism is," a condition none too surprising, this is the least of their sins. "Very many businessmen do not know the difference between a communist and an anarchist, democratic socialist, or mere eccentric dissident," scolds Burnham. "They pick up a pompous phrase like 'socialism is the half-way house to communism,' and imagine that by repeating it they are being profoundly philosophical."²⁹

Defending Hubert Humphrey, the Reuther brothers, and labor leader John L. Lewis against the Right, Burnham turned his fire on the "greedy" capitalists, whose "monstrous incomes and profits have an antagonizing and demoralizing effect upon the workers, and the rest of the poorly or normally paid members of society, in this country and throughout the world. These income statistics are emotional explosives handed gratuitously to the communist propaganda machine." Another villain is the businessman who stupidly resists the trade union attempt to extort tribute. "Some of the businessmen, plain and simple reactionaries, are absolutely anti-union,"

This book, written over a decade after his formal break with Marxism, cannot be so easily dismissed as the remnants of a recently shed ideological skin. How easily these phrases—"greedy" capitalists, "monstrous incomes and profits"—could be lifted out of context and dropped onto the pages of some Trotskyist jeremiad! Although now a man of the Right, Burnham still spoke the language of egalitarianism, in which all profits beyond some ineluctable minimum are "monstrous." No plain and simple reactionary, Burnham had nothing but contempt for the crude and grasping American entrepreneur, who was apparently too dull to recognize his own best interests.

In his attitude toward business and the mysterious exigencies of the market, Burnham shared the general view held by most American intellectuals: It was all dreadfully vulgar and distasteful. This equation of commercialism with philistinism is deeply embedded in European political culture but alien to America. It was the intellectuals who imported this foreign affectation to our shores; certainly most if not all of the intellectuals who graced the pages of *Partisan Review* were imbued with it. In moving rightward, Burnham did not discard it but carried it with him into the conservative movement, where its echoes are to be found today in the calls emanating from the neoconservative camp for a "socially responsible" and "democratic" capitalism.

Hailing the rise of the new managerial classes—the engineers, soldiers, government bureaucrats, and other "professionals" whose status had been elevated by World War II—Burnham decided that he didn't really need the businessmen, especially if they insisted on opposing such political innovations as "the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Export-Import Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Marshall Plan, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation"—in short, the whole structure of the welfare-warfare state built up by Roosevelt and extended by Truman. "I do not wish to imply that I think that all of these and of the other major changes of this period have been 'good.' But most of them have been almost inescapable adaptations to the quickly changing world in which we are living." In a footnote, he berates Wendell Wilkie for "having made his public reputation as the representative of Commonwealth & Southern in battling [the] TVA. I wonder how many stockholders of Commonwealth & Southern have reflected on the fact that their properties . . . are now paying dividends, and are immeasurably better off as a direct result of the area development brought about by TVA?"³¹

In Burnham's totalistic view, *everything* had to be subordinated to the fight against international communism: even capitalism itself. Capitalism was, at any rate, doomed, according to the theory of the managerial revolution, and hardly worth fighting for.

What, then, was the West supposed to be fighting for? In a word: *power*. Summing up the career of James Burnham, ideologue, which telescoped in many ways the progression of a whole generation of intellectuals from Left to Right, we can point to a single theme dominating all the phases of his evolution: the manipulation of power by an elite. Like most of the intellectuals of his generation, as Orwell pointed out, Burnham was fascinated by power and possessed by the desire to wield it. This is the leitmotif of his life's work.

O'Sullivan attempts to defend Burnham against Orwell's charges by citing a letter in which Orwell agrees that the trend is toward centralism and planning "whether we like it or not." Correctly explaining this by noting that both men were socialists, he writes that Orwell "remained a curious kind of cranky, unsystematic British socialist," while "Burnham evolved into a curious kind of American conservative." Curious indeed, as one examines the record of Burnham's written works, and certainly for the time. In our own time this sort of conservatism is still curious, but no longer quite so unfamiliar. The seed planted by Burnham—and the other defectors from Communism who were soon to follow him in droves—has sprouted and flourished to such an extent that it now threatens the delicate ecology of the conservative movement.

O'Sullivan presents us with a choice of Burnhamite visions: the three super-states of *The Managerial Revolution*, based on the three major trade blocs led by the U.S., Japan, and Germany; or else the U.S.-led World Empire of *The Struggle for the World*—with the former based on protectionism, and the latter on free trade.

O'Sullivan does not reveal why it would be impossible to have a tripartite world based on relatively free trade—or what would prevent subsidies and trade barriers from distorting the economic structure of his U.S.-led World Empire. Surely our allied "Barons" would demand something as the price of their allegiance. But all this is beside the point: O'Sullivan's argument is just a diversion from the emptiness at the core of the new Burnhamite dispensation. What he is evading is the answer to the question: *Why* should America take on the burden of empire, now that Communism has collapsed, when

back to their own affairs, back to economic matters and concern for community and family?

As the manifesto of post-cold war conservatism, O'Sullivan's essay is fatally flawed. If Burnham is the best the "New World Order" conservatives can come up with, the sole or even the major precedent for a globalism of the Right, then the effort is doomed to failure. Burnham, although intimately connected with *National Review*, was always the outsider, a permanent guest in the house of the Right, who was barely able to tolerate what he no doubt considered the curiously archaic and even primeval customs of his conservative hosts.

GLOBALISM OF THE RIGHT

It is true, as O'Sullivan says, that James Burnham was prescient in many ways; his predictions concerning the internal weaknesses of the Soviet Union in *The Coming Defeat of Communism* were for the most part accurate. But in an important sense, he missed the boat even in this area. While correctly pointing to the vital national question as the Achilles heel of the Soviet Union, and while citing endemic economic problems, Burnham did not believe that the masses of the Communist bloc, left to themselves, would ever revolt, or, if they did, that their struggle could be anything other than sporadic and ineffective.

Containment or Liberation, The Suicide of the West, and much of Burnham's published writings after *The Struggle for the World* were devoted to developing a vast and detailed plan, coordinated on a world scale, to eradicate the Communist menace. In every sphere of social and political activity, from the labor unions to the cultural front, Burnham urged the U.S. government to organize the cadres of the counter-revolution into a kind of Anticomintern, devoted to spreading the doctrine of the "democratic world order" by word and deed. This huge apparatus, supported not only by tax dollars but by U.S. military might, would have a fighting chance to defeat the enemy, but only if U.S. policy makers recognized the nature of the threat and immediately acted to meet it.

The vast apparatus of official anti-communism, the creation and expansion of which Burnham spent much of his life urging, has outlived its adversary. Today, although this giant machine is dormant, it is not demobilized. The Voice of America, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the like live on. This is due to the fact that these bureaucracies, like all such

lobby on their behalf and save them, year after year, from the budget-cutter's axe.

Now the very existence of the "pro-democracy" bureaucracy is being called into question. After all, if there is no enemy, then the war is over—right? Wrong, say the neoconservatives. Instead of dismantling the network of political *apparatchiks* that waged the cold war on the ideological front, we ought to greatly expand it *precisely because* we find ourselves, as Charles Krauthammer puts it, at the "unipolar moment." With no enemy and therefore no obstacle in our path, now is the time to act before that moment passes. The post-cold war world, they argue, is the perfect opportunity for the U.S. to make its bid for empire.

It is the old Burnhamite idea of a "democratic world order," revived and refurbished—but with a new twist. The neocon credo of "exporting democracy" is Burnhamism minus the scenery, i.e. minus the threat of implacable Communism looming in the background. What is left is the fascination with power, and Burnham's original vision of a managerial elite in the saddle on a world scale.

Certainly most Americans would scoff at the idea of an American Empire and remain unmoved by the prospect of a "New World Order." But the neocons think they have figured out a way around this. As Burnham predicted, these would-be Caesars do not openly call for an empire; only the haughty Krauthammer dares to name what he is advocating. Instead, in what is the ultimate irony, they pose as champions of "democracy." Rather than seeking to build an empire, which the American people would not long tolerate, the advocates of the new globalism claim to be "exporting democracy." This is the new myth in the name of which the world-savers and would-be world planners empty our wallets and fill their coffers; the new rationale for the existence of countless think-tanks and the cushy jobs that go with them; the latest code word for a frankly imperial policy, unrestrained by either modesty or common sense.

The proper goal of U.S. foreign policy is not to protect and defend the people of this country, say the democratists; it is to extend our system to the rest of the globe. It is a temptation that will be the undoing of the American republic. Such a policy would have to mean constant wars, and attendant confiscatory taxation and political and economic centralization. In addition, what greater threat to our form of government exists than the clandestine machinations of American intelligence agencies engaged in political intrigues, all carried out under the shroud of official secrecy? Yet Burnham and

and conspiracy with which the CIA cloaked its activities. Indeed, Burnham worked as a consultant for the CIA. He was a founder and leading light of the CIA-financed International Congress for Cultural Freedom and its U.S. affiliate, the American Congress for Cultural Freedom, which provided a base for so many liberal anti-Communists during the fifties.

This affiliation is the organizational link between two generations of leftist intellectuals moving rapidly rightward. Many of today's neoconservatives were yesterday's liberal anti-Communists who, unwittingly or not, played the CIA's game. But this allegiance, while not irrelevant, is potentially misleading. For in the end it is ideology that connects the generations, a common origin in the same troublesome brand of schismatic Trotskyism that blew apart the Socialist Workers Party on the eve of World War II and enjoyed an independent existence long after that event.

It is therefore instructive for those who would understand what is happening to the conservative movement to examine the history of the anti-Stalinist Left. Before we can begin to see how and why the original ideology and goals of the American Right have become corrupted, it is necessary to examine the roots of that corruption in a strain of leftist ideology that seems to carry within itself some mutating power, some crucial gene that transformed a generation of American intellectuals, and may yet succeed in rendering the conservative movement unrecognizable.