

## *The Bend Sinister*

**Leftism: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Marcuse**, by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1974. 653 pp. \$12.95.*

IT IS PROBABLY unfortunate that "left" and "right" have come increasingly to be the generic terms of political taxonomy, for in themselves they connote little. Indeed, if opposition or assent to the party in power be their respective meanings—as much etymology and continental history suggest—then those assenting to the communist governments dominating some two thirds of the world today would find themselves on the right. But if on the other hand "left" and "right" conjure up images of "extremes" which somehow mysteriously "meet"—as often seems the case in American politics—the commended "moderation" leaves us with only another pair of equally uninformative terms. Add to all this the evolution of the term "liberal" (especially in America), the contextual dependency of "conservative," and political taxonomy—at least with regard to these minimally descriptive terms—becomes a messy and even doubtful undertaking.

There comes now a fascinating book which attempts to give order to these issues and their underlying realities on a truly global scale, both geographically and historically. Dr. von Kuehnelt-Leddihn draws upon a lifetime of travel and experience, but especially upon an encyclopaedic array of the world's literature (the two hundred pages of notes and references are derived from the better parts of six continents) to give a ringing indictment of "the multi-faceted, multiheaded enemy which is *leftism*." He is clearly writing to America, however, to that great part of (often "conservative") America which is oblivious or even hostile to ideology. If we are to un-

derstand the events of our world and our rôle amidst those events—and von Kuehnelt-Leddihn thinks we have often gravely misunderstood both in this century—it is imperative, he believes, that we come to an appreciation of those searching issues that characterized, for example, the political debate of eighteenth century America and that continue today to dominate the political discourse and color the ideologies of the rest of the world. Hence, the book aims at both the reduction of what he takes to be the Great Continental Misunderstanding which has evolved between America and Free Europe over the last two centuries and the Quest for Truth, for the right political order.

These are ambitious undertakings, to be sure, the kind most contemporary scholars would eschew (especially those American academic "specialists" von Kuehnelt-Leddihn delights in citing, the ones who, when they make their way to government positions, are required to make decisions "out of their fields," often with disastrous results). To organize his discussion, then, and to come to grips with these terms "left" and "right," he sets forth two broad human tendencies, one toward identity, the other toward diversity. Though we will all from time to time be moved by either of these, the leftist mind, he argues, has historically been dominated by identitarianism, by the need to efface the self in the group: egalitarianism, uniformity, the search for a ubiquitous (and safe) sameness, he contends, have characterized the minds and movements of the left, from religious monasticism to secular socialism and communism. By contrast, the diversitarian mind of the right recognizes the variety of life, the differences, indeed, the hierarchies of people and peoples: this is the mature mind, unmoved by an envy of those who are different, or even "better." Armed with this ideological dichotomy (only adumbrated here), von Kuehnelt-Leddihn proceeds to weave a rich and varied texture of historical analysis, touching upon the ancient and medieval origins of leftism, deal-

ing rather more extensively with the American and French Revolutions (especially as the latter evolved and detoured through Democracy, Romantic Socialism, Scientific and International Socialism, Communism, Marxism, Fascist Nationalism, National Socialism, and Socialist Racism), and culminating in a broad treatment of twentieth century American foreign policy, especially in its effect upon the continent. The Reformation, the evolution of "liberalism," both on the continent and in America, the Spanish Civil War, anticolonialism, the New Left—all are fit more or less comfortably into this grand scheme of things.

This is, again, an ambitious book, treating immense issues, ranging over politics, theology, psychology, philosophy, history, even etymology. Not unexpectedly, the fit is not always comfortable, nor is the grasp always sure. There are incautious remarks—"Any historian could have told the [World War I] victors that political forms imposed by the triumphant enemy *never last*" (original emphasis); misinterpretations—Professor Edward Lee Thorndike's quoted remarks on evolutionary biology, far from representing a nihilistic naturalism, serve, when properly understood, to underpin the psychological assumptions of classical (Manchester) economics; and sometimes unsupported (and unfortunate) speculations—it is not true that "the I.Q.'s of Africans *on the average* are a great deal lower than ours" (original emphasis), nor to the best of our knowledge is that difference which we can measure owing to the fact that the African child between two and seven does not get "a maximum of contacts with adults when the cortex of the brain is being developed." Ironically, in coming down on the "environmental" side of this issue, von Kuehnelt-Leddihn will find himself among leftists.

Undoubtedly there are many who would object as well to this bringing together under one label of so many seemingly disparate movements—including and especially democracy. To the observation that this is not the way we use these terms "left" and

"right," von Kuehnelt-Leddihn would likely reply, so much the worse for our confused usage; and in this he is probably correct. That International Socialism is placed on the left and National Socialism on the right, as is commonly done, is not a little odd—and even suspicious. It is a central thesis of the book, however, that the democratism to flow from the French Revolution (though not from the American, which was neither a revolution nor the creation of a genuine democracy) set in motion the identitarian forces responsible for most of the barbarities of the last two hundred years. With de Tocqueville, von Kuehnelt-Leddihn loves liberty, but fears democracy; moreover, he not only finds no necessary connection between the two, but an outright antipathy, a tendency of the latter to lead to the elimination of the former.

What are we to say here? From Plato to Sir Isaiah Berlin we have heard it. And the historical evidence is, to be sure, mixed, though von Kuehnelt-Leddihn has done a commendable job of ferreting out the material he needs to make his case persuasively. Around the globe over the past two hundred years democracy has been tried and has failed, usually at tragic cost. Monarchies more or less benevolent, with their "legitimacy" rooted in organic conceptions of long standing, have been replaced by "self-rule" and its "rationalistic" legitimacy—often at the demand of outside "liberalizing" forces—only to be followed by despotism, with a legitimacy founded on brute force. Exhibit A is the demise of the Hapsburg Empire at the insistence of the Allies following World War I. Even Churchill, at the conclusion of World War II, had to allow that "This war should never have come unless, under American and modernizing pressure, we had driven the Hapsburgs out of Austria and Hungary and the Hohenzollerns out of Germany. . . . No doubt these views are very unfashionable."

No doubt they are. For modern political theory is grounded on the bedrock of consent, however attenuated or meaningless.

Thus the "people's democracies" with their mandatory voting, their insistence upon formal "legitimacy." No lack of Rousellian self-rule there. But what of that handful of democracies still in existence? Herein, perhaps, lies the single largest flaw in the book: it is not so much that von Kuehnelt-Leddihn takes insufficient notice of these countries as that he fails to be sufficiently cognizant of their institutional restraints upon the "tyranny of the majority." No doubt he would reply that even constitutions can be amended. And so it seems that the argument comes down at last to whether the governed are responsible, to whether those who rule themselves are sufficiently diversitarian to make democracy work as a means to individual liberty (and not simply as a grossly inadequate manifestation of that liberty). If they are not, if our Rousellian view of man is insufficiently realistic, then the more we expect in the way of political self-rule, the more we take decisions out of the hands of people *qua* individuals to be put into their hands *qua* voters, the more likely we are to see our systems come crashing down about us.

This book raises serious questions for those perhaps too complacent about democracy. It provides Americans with a refreshingly different perspective on the history of this century, and it is, finally, a pleasure to read.

Reviewed by ROGER PILON

---

### *The Military Prognosis*

**Can America Win the Next War?**, by Drew Middleton, *New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975. 271 pp. \$8.95.*

DREW MIDDLETON, long a military correspondent for *The New York Times*, has written a book which will probably receive wide attention, and it should. On the

premise that conflict is endemic in human affairs and out of knowledge that the Soviet Union considers conflict inevitable and is therefore preparing for it, Middleton speculates about future wars of the United States. Will they be nuclear, conventional, guerrilla? Of what scale? Who will be the enemy? Where the battleground? Most important of all, whatever the war, will America be able to win?

Middleton's answers to the foregoing questions are disturbing, a fact in which the author takes some pride (he speaks grandiosely about thinking the unthinkable). Because of trends in American society towards corruption, moral decay, economic instability, and weak leadership, Middleton doubts the ability of the United States to intervene effectively abroad in coming years. He soberly estimates that the Soviet Union is overtaking the United States in gross combat power, then concludes that the United States might fare well in a low-intensity war, that is a remote conflict involving lesser states in which the United States provided arms, equipment, and perhaps advice, but did not become a protagonist. The United States would be able to conduct and perhaps to win in medium-intensity conflict (direct hostilities against second- or third-rate powers or remote states), as long as the Soviet Union did not take a hand on the other side. But in high-intensity conflict, war against the Soviet Union in some important area such as Europe, Middleton reckons that the United States could not hope to win, even to hold even, whether or not nuclear weapons came into use.

But disturbing weaknesses in the analysis leave one feeling unsettled. Middleton is inconsistent in this treatment of the NATO problem. Early in the book he derides its prominence in American military strategy and budget planning; later he becomes excessively occupied with the most obvious and overworked aspects of conflict scenarios surrounding the defense of Europe. He makes uncritical use of the meaningless terminology surrounding debates on