

# A WORD TO 'TIRED RADICALS'

By MIKE GOLD

"TIRED RADICALS," an essay by Walter Weyl that appeared some 35 years ago in the weekly, "New Republic," has a curious timeliness today. Mr. Weyl was giving friendly and fatherly advice to the disillusioned radicals of that epoch.

There were plenty of them, Heaven knows, because of liberal disappointment with Woodrow Wilson's war "to make the world safe for democracy," and because of the great Coolidge boom.

The liberals had gone overboard for that war. Many had red-hunted, informed and served as propagandists in the government. Their sacrifice of principle did not change the character of the imperialist peace that followed the war. So they packed the barrooms of Paris and New York, pitying themselves enormously with Hemingway.

Many were infected by the Boom with the usual arrogance and the theory of American exceptionalism. They became barroom supermen and Nietzscheans with H. L. Mencken, who taught them to despise the American "mob"—the "booboisie"—in short, democracy and the people.

Mr. Weyl's essay was meant to save that generation from fascism, the only logical end of such cynicism and nihilism.

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WITH THE bedside urbanity of a New Republic editor, Mr. Weyl advised those intellectuals to retire gracefully from the political scene. They were sick, and should recognize that they were sick. If they looked their sickness in the face, it might prevent them from turning into sour, bitter renegades, a menace to the



democracy they once had faith in. Let's have a quiet divorce, Mr. Weyl was pleading in effect. Don't slander and publicly defame the mother of your children whom you once loved. You don't have to turn into a warped and dirty informer; just step aside, and let the democracy keep rolling along.

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HE ADVISED them to take up some cheerful hobby, to learn the piano, to cultivate garden, to collect rocks, postage stamps or books.

In America today we have again a period of crazy boom nearing a possible bust, as well as heartbreak and political disillusionment such as followed the Khrushchev revelations.

The renegades are about the same sick, envenomed breed as yesterday. The host of "tired radicals," on the other hand, are decent people who have just lost their way. Many are veterans of decades of social struggle, in which they always remained loyal and courageous. The pressure of McCarthyism, the breakdown of all leadership in this country, added to the Khrushchev horror, have set up a true moral fatigue.

Thirty-five years later they have taken the kindly advice of Dr. Weyl, and without venom or hatred, have stepped to the sidelines. Quietly, gracefully they have taken up hobbies and personal interests, in an attempt to deaden the pain in hearts that once beat strongly for progress and the human dream.

It can't work, of course. It is like a premature old age for which one isn't yet ready to accept. It is a vacuum, and the heart of man rejects any such vacuum. Man is happy only in struggle and creation.

Whatever it is, the feelings of such people are honest, and their wounds are the wounds of a friend. This places a heavy responsibility on those who remain in the left movement, particularly the Communist party.

Bureaucracy and its principal sins, which are a lack of contact with the rank and file of America, a lack of

creative free speech for the rank and file in its own party, must be rooted out before the wanderers will return from their swamps.

All the house of American labor, political and trade union, needs a thorough cleaning. Can the discontented help in the cleaning by voting with their feet? I doubt it.

Leadership is needed. There is crisis in leadership in America that ranges from the White House to Union Square. Our left leadership will have to develop some new original theorizing to contribute to the national pool of democratic thought. It is one way of reviving socialism in America.

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MEANWHILE, let me for a brief moment assume the mantle of the good Dr. Weyl and offer a few words of fraternal advice to the wanderers, watchers and waiters.

"Don't exaggerate. Once you exaggerated the virtues of the left, now don't exaggerate its faults. Try for common sense and realism.

"Don't think history is static. It always moves on. This period will blow up of its contradictions. It always has.

"Don't brood or beat your breast unnecessarily. Look to the future—not the past. Keep flowing with the great river of life.

"Talk things over with every friend you have. Collective thinking is better than anguished introspection of the individual.

"Do something positive, however tiny it seems. Take up the Marxist studies you have long neglected. This is a good time to broaden your mind. Engage in cultural activity. Become a student of radical literature, novels, poetry, paintings, music. Your hearts are pure. You will be born again—don't doubt this!"