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## Yes, but . . .

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# *MODERN AGE*

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## Yes, but . . .

Steven Alan Samson and William F. Rickenbacker

***Leftism Revisited: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Pol Pot***, by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990. xx + 520 pp. \$29.95.

### I

#### Steven Alan Samson

WHEN IS THE LAST time you heard a word breathed against democracy? Today's conservative is apt to sing paeans to "the spirit of democratic capitalism" or to the "democratic revolutions" that now rock the crumbling Communist empire. Contrast these sentiments with those of the Founding Fathers, who, as Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn notes, "despised democracy." The antipathy expressed by Alexander Hamilton to George Washington—"The people, Sir, your people are a great beast"—sounds strange to our ears today.

Here the reader might object: "But Hamilton was a closet royalist and unpopular, to boot! Who elected *him*!" Consider John Adams, then: "Democracy will envy all, contend with all, endeavor to pull down all, and when by chance it happens to get the upper hand for a short time, it will be revengeful, bloody, and cruel." Or Thomas Jefferson: "The mobs of the great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human

body." Two centuries ago Adams and Jefferson represented the opposite poles of American politics. Yet both favored "natural aristocracy" and "republican government."

In his newly revised *Leftism Revisited: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Pol Pot* (Regnery Gateway, 1991; originally published by Arlington House, 1974), Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, an Austrian aristocrat and long-term observer of America and Americans, claims that "the foundations of the American republic are aristocratic and Whiggish with an anti-monarchic bent." The War for Independence itself held considerable appeal for the European nobility. The evident justice of the American cause won to its side many young noblemen, who crossed the Atlantic as volunteers. Kosciusko, Pulaski, von Steuben, Rochambeau, Lafayette, de Kalb, and the nearly forgotten "Colonel Armand" Tuffin won battlefield honors while helping win American independence. If, as John Adams noted later in life, the "revolution" was first won in the hearts and minds of the people, it caught the imaginations of Europeans, as well.

By sharp contrast, Kuehnelt-Leddihn regards the French Revolution as "historically the mother of most of the ideological evils besetting civilization, not only of the West but of the entire world." It is true, he notes, that "a filiation be-

tween the American War for Independence and the French Revolution existed in a psychological sense, *but there was a tremendous and catastrophic misunderstanding as far as ideas and content were concerned*—the first in a row of never-ending mutual transatlantic misinterpretations and misjudgments.”

The French Revolution is the event that gave impetus to the ideological and increasingly pagan transformation of Christian civilization. The utopian hopes of the French Enlightenment began moving out of the salons and cafés of Parisian high society, first into the streets, then into the capitals of Europe, and more recently into the living rooms and public schools of the middle and lower classes everywhere. Nationalism burst onto center stage in 1789 to the tune of the *Marseillaise* and the rhythm of marching boots began to jar the dynastic thrones of Europe. But the nationalist impulse was polluted at its source. “The spirit of the *Marseillaise* was Nazi and racist: ‘To arms, citizens, form your battalions, let us march, march, so that impure blood will drench our furrows.’”

Two centuries of revolution—1789, 1917, and 1933—have given us only a utopia of “guillotines, gaols, gallows, gas chambers, and gulags.” Francisco Goya recognized very early that “the dream of reason produces nightmares,” some of which he witnessed and recorded in a series of etchings of the French occupation of Spain, entitled *The Disasters of War*. Consider the nightmare of Charles-Armand Tuffin. Having fought so bravely for American independence, he returned to his castle in France only to watch with increasing despair the anarchy and the despotism that tore apart his country under the banner of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Lacking Lafayette’s keen instinct for self-preservation, Tuffin took up arms again and stood in the breach, but soon fell ill and died early in 1793 while planning an insurrection against

the fratricidal revolutionary government. His collaborators were fed to the guillotine, as were thousands of others. Of such injustices are great civilizations undone.

The new edition of *Leftism Revisited* begins with an amusing anecdote about the last lecture of Theodor W. Adorno, the chief author of *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) and a New Left luminary of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School. Adorno was the co-inventor of the F-Scale (F for Fascism), a social science research profile which was used by leftist academics in the 1950s to discredit their political antagonists as “authoritarian” and “undemocratic.” (Perhaps it is a sign of progress that today’s “thought police,” by contrast, seem to have given up even the pretense of being scientific). The moral of the story is that revolutions also devour their authors, sometimes in strangely appropriate ways. But the campus rebellion of the late 1960s which, at one point, brought Adorno to a tearful comeuppance also sparked a reaction. “More and more Americans came to the conclusion that Right is right and Left is wrong.”

Here again the reader might object: “Right is right and Left is wrong? What nonsense!” Not at all. One might as well object to the preponderance of evidence drawn from history, language, and the Bible. The story is *always* the same: the sheep are sent to the right and the goats to the left. Some are made vessels unto honor; others unto dishonor. This the rebel can never abide. Exalting the sheep, he protests, is unfair to the goats.

Leftism is first and foremost a religion of revolution, something that Edmund Burke recognized near the outset and Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer two generations later. It is the conscious and deliberate transvaluation—with malice aforethought—of western Christendom, its symbols, and its foundational truths. In Manichean fashion, it exalts the humble

and abases the proud on its own terms and its own authority. After all, "turn-about is fair play." It is the old leveling spirit—"a dull, animalistic leaning towards social conformity"—seeking to bring down all high things, even on a cosmic scale. As Saint Paul recognized, it worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. Rejecting the transcendental perspective of Christianity, Leftism substitutes another gospel: a version of the story told by goats.

The name of this *ersatz* religion is legion. Whether it is John Dewey's "common faith," or Auguste Comte's "religion of humanity" (Comte is claimed by some as a conservative!), or the diabolical "socialism" dissected by Igor Shafarevich, it draws on the same narcissistic program first insinuated by the serpent in the garden and later, according to Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, broached to Jesus in the Judean wilderness. It is this same "revolutionary faith" that the present Librarian of Congress, James Billington, studied in all of its pageantry and pretense in *Fire in the Minds of Men*.

By taking the everyday passions of life and dramatizing them, the revolutionary ideologue aims to hit people where they live. Hence revolutionary theater. All the world is a stage. The arts are increasingly exalted as an exquisite yet powerful medium of propaganda.

Indeed, it appears that all of modern life has come to be driven by these two engines—power and pleasure—though in widely varied ways. The spirit of our age seems to be embodied by "the Divine Marquis," the Comte de Sade, who is known as "the grandfather of modern democracy" but is even better known to American philistines as a pornographic novelist.

Kuehnelt-Leddihn describes the revolution de Sade helped inspire as, "in so many ways, a sanguinary sex orgy." So decadent have we become that we now seek little more than to sublimate or

domesticate the revolution in our midst. Few hope—or care—to stop the contagion of raw greed and violence. Here again the revolutionary program mimics Christianity by insisting, in its own way, that "without the shedding of blood is no remission."

Consider for a moment the importance of the Christian sacraments in the history of the West. Is it too much to say that communion wine represents the lifeblood of Christian civilization? The communion cup dramatizes and reminds us of the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. It is the shedding of His blood—"once for all"—that binds past, present, and future into a coherent community of faith. It is this very community that the Left seeks to imitate, appropriate, subvert, neutralize, and ultimately destroy, just as a parasite destroys its host.

We do not have to search far for examples. They confront us in the biography of our own nation. A careful theological reading of Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" should raise some eyebrows. The use of sacramental language in Abraham Lincoln's Lyceum Address of 1838 should disturb its readers enough to reexamine his more familiar later speeches. What about John Dewey's description of the public school teacher as "the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God"? A much older and presumably more chastened Dewey later added: "I cannot understand how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed." Quite so. But, ever the moralist, Dewey still preferred to see us all—sheep and goats, not to mention wolves—adrift in the same boat rather than accept a "spiritual aristocracy." In this he resembles a character in one of Kuehnelt-Leddihn's short stories, the "good pagan:" a pathetic creature who,

having refused the real wine of faith, prefers "the whiff of an empty bottle." Dewey's idea of democracy was a teetotaler's paradise.

The trouble is that revolutionary democracy, like the "bad pagan," is anything but moderate. The same may be said of Kuehnelt-Leddihn's telling of its tale. He writes in the Continental rather than the Anglo-Saxon manner, he says, "in order to give a wholesome jolt" to the reader. "Complacency is out. I am admittedly a radical, a man who tries to get to the root of the matter." The author spares us few details while dissecting the "ideology of democracy": specifically its utopian egalitarianism, social conformity, hatred of diversity, and capacity for violence. So be warned! This book is not for the faint of heart or the queasy of stomach.

The first part of *Leftism Revisited* revolves around a series of contrasts—identity and diversity (the one and the many), equality and liberty, democracy and liberalism, right and left—that help flesh out the character of Leftism while reclaiming the political language of modern liberalism, which has been expropriated by the Left. "Usurp" could be used here just as easily as "expropriate." It is the revolutionary imperative: Take whatever properly belongs to your enemy—ideas, values, property, position, power, family—and use it to defeat him. Those who see only unrelated battles over isolated issues miss the essence of the cultural wars that rage in our midst. Kuehnelt-Leddihn takes care to show, in the words of the first edition, that "the vast majority of the leftist ideologies now dominating or threatening most of the modern world are *competitors* rather than *enemies*."

In an earlier essay, Kuehnelt-Leddihn argued that the script of modern history has been written by the two Johns of Geneva, Calvin and Rousseau. The first stood for the glory of God; the other substituted the worship of humanity.

Here once again he observes that their intellectual heirs remain locked in battle.

Let us note that the *causes célèbres* of the Left may change—nationalism, democracy, progress, globalism, racism, eugenics, feminism, environmentalism, cosmic consciousness, political correctness, Afrocentrism—but the central purpose remains the same: Efface the image of God in man for the sake of some other sovereign, some other program, and some other salvation. In a chapel message a few years ago, Kuehnelt-Leddihn declared that the real issue is the choice we must make between God and nothing. Our problem, as Solzhenitsyn declared just a few years ago, is that "we have forgotten God."

Today, the lurches and spasms of a sick Red dinosaur blind us to the "inner crisis of the West," a much graver peril than the threat of Communism. This should be evident in the deadly evolution of democracy toward "the totalitarian provider state" with its "increasing drug consumption, the mass butchering of the unborn, the shrinking birth rates, the decline of family life, the evanescence of authority."

*Leftism Revisited* concludes with a warning that the "swaddling clothes of nationalism and democracy, two forms of collectivist horizontalism . . . , threaten to become shrouds, soon to suffocate us." Indeed, the better part of our culture lies encased in museum-tombs or preserved in obscure cubbyholes. Most of its heirs seem to have lost all conviction and left the city gates unguarded. As Kuehnelt-Leddihn noted in the first edition, "polite doubt or relativism . . . will neither lead to 'progress' nor protect us against the assaults of the organized or unorganized left, old or new. Man is willing to die only in the service of genuine convictions, for an exclamation mark, not for a question mark."

The author saves his severest strictures for the "mild" Leftism of the "good

pagan," not to mention the kind of Christian for whom there is no yesterday and no tomorrow. Here I am thinking of a cartoon on the title page of one of his earlier books, *The Timeless Christian* (1968). An intense little man with an empty head is marching relentlessly ahead. The caption reads: "Stupidity roams the world." It would be hard to find a more succinct description of Kuehnelt-Leddihn's thesis in *Leftism Revisited*.

After recording leftist genealogies in the second part (Campanella begat de Sade, Rousseau begat Robespierre, and so forth), Kuehnelt-Leddihn proceeds to distinguish between real liberalism (Adam Smith, Tocqueville, Mises, Hayek) and false liberalism (Holmes, Dewey, B. F. Skinner) in the third part. The book concludes with a long section on "The Left and U.S. Foreign Policy," beginning with the great crusade launched by Woodrow Wilson, who suffered from "the Great American Malady, the belief that people the world over are 'more alike than unlike.'"

Kuehnelt-Leddihn does not flinch in assigning blame. George Davis Herron, a clergyman and aide to President Wilson, "helped dig the grave of Old Europe," he says. Concerning "World War I and its seemingly permanent aftermath," he argues:

Two facts stand out: Twice it was a Democratic administration (comprising the greater part of the leftist forces) that engaged the United States in a global war, and twice two hierarchical organizations—industry and the military—won the wars. It was the democratically elected or appointed politicians that lost the fruits of these costly victories—costly in blood and money—at the conference tables. In the long run, genuine achievements do not come from mere intuitions, but only through knowledge. The engineers and captains of industry, the generals and the admirals, had *learned* their trade. The politicians had their jobs solely because they were popular.

Lamentably, the gap between *Scita* (popular intuition) and *Scienda* (genuine knowledge) "is incessantly and cruelly widening."

So a final word of caution is in order. The stripping away of illusions, which is a necessary part of the maturing process, can be a profoundly demoralizing experience, too. Since the book is written for English readers, many of the book's best shots are aimed at the leaders of the great island nations, including the United States, that lie on this side of the English Channel. If you entertain a high opinion of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, or American foreign policy generally, be prepared for some bad news. The author keeps his powder dry. Much of it, by the way, he stores in the 150 pages of notes. Read them and weep. Individually and corporately, we have much to repent.

\* Originally published under the title *Leftism: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Marcuse* (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1974).

## II

### **William F. Rickenbacker**

ACCORDING TO MY reckoning, Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn's latest work contains about 148,000 words of text proper plus about 81,000 words of notes. Much of the fascination of the book lies in those very notes, as William F. Buckley Jr. suggests in his generously phrased Introduction. For example:

Hitler, though never a paperhanger, allegedly sold hand-colored postcards in coffee houses, a far more humiliating livelihood than any honest craft. (Theoretically, it is quite possible that he hawked his art to Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, or de Gasperi, all of whom frequented the Café Central in Vienna's Herengasse.) Easily