

JAN 28 1979

*French Socialist Follows Solzhenitsyn's Steps—*

# Another Dante Roams Red Hell

"BARBARISM WITH A HUMAN FACE," by Bernard-Henri Levy. (Translated by George Holoch, Harper & Row, 210 PP., \$10.)

Reviewed by JOHN BARKHAM

This is the anti-Communist polemic by a French Socialist which created such a furor in Europe last year. Levy is an intellectual, and his assault on Stalinist totalitarianism is cast on a theoretical plane from which he rarely descends to the level of daily politics. His pages are larded with quotations from philosophers and ideologues past and present in what adds up to a formidable indictment of Marxism.

His "archeology of the present," as he calls his book, reflects the disillusionment of democratic Socialists like himself over the barbarous excesses of Stalinism. No society, Levy points out, is without power, and in Marxist societies power is mercilessly exercised by the few over the many. As for Western Socialists, Levy sees them now for what they are — impractical dreamers waiting for a millennium that is always somewhere in the future, a future that never comes.

Having served as adviser to Francois Mitterand, the French Socialist leader, Levy knows whereof he speaks. He inveighs bitterly against the myopic optimism of the radical left which euphemizes an election setback as an "advance" and which glosses over Stalin's crimes as "deviations." To him those crimes are the inevitable product of a system bent on the destruction of its real or fancied enemies. "Totalitarianism," Levy asserts, "is the new and unparalleled fact of our age. Stalinism and fascism are the planetary alembics in which new forms of power have been tested for the last 50 years." The totalitarian state, he declares, has placed "truth in chains."

All this is proclaimed with a shock of surprise, as if Levy had stumbled on a new and revolutionary truth. So no doubt it may have seemed to be a good Socialist like himself though it has long been recognized in the West. What appears to have opened Levy's eyes was Solzhenitsyn's staggering revelations in his "Gulag Archipelago." Until then Levy (and doubtless other European Socialists) had merely known of Stalin's executions and forced labor camps. Solzhenitsyn's powerful chapter and verse for the first time compelled them to believe it in all its horror. Levy hails Solzhenitsyn as the new Dante with his revelations of a Communist Hell.



Bernard-Henri Levy

Like a converted infidel, Levy is now moved to deep and abiding indignation—and pessimism. "Marxism," he says, "is healthy and has never been so healthy. In spite of its intellectual decline it will penetrate every stratum of civil and political society." This sounds to be uncommonly like a defeatist conclusion. Marxism exists only where it has been imposed and maintained by force. If the citizens of the Soviet Union and its satellites were permitted to leave for the West tomorrow, probably half the population would do so.

Levy concedes that he has written a "sad" book, but, coming as it does from the Socialist Left, it serves the useful purpose of admitting that Marxism is merely a contemporary version of despotic power that can be traced back to the beginnings of history. Only in the "decadent" West, with its "depraved" notions of personal liberty, can a book like this be published. In the Soviet Union it would have landed Levy in the Gulag Archipelago.