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Disillusioned French Writer Drops From Ranks of Marxists

BARBARISM WITH A HUMAN FACE, by Bernard-Henri Levy (Harper & Row, \$10)

By J.J. HOWARD
For The Press-Scimitar

A book that apparently has created a stir in Europe is *Barbarism With a Human Face*. Written in French by Bernard-Henri Levy, it has been translated into English by George Holoch.

Levy, the author, is disillusioned with Marxism in all its socialist and fascist varieties. At times he sounds penitent, for he has been active in leftism. Holding a teaching degree in philosophy, he has been advisor to the government of Bangladesh and to Francois Mitterand, leader of the French socialist party, and was formerly a leftwing journalist.

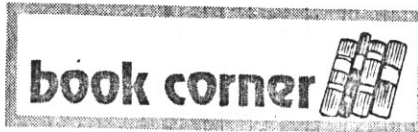


Howard

Now he is a pessimist with no more hope for improvement of the human race and civilization through Marxism. At points in his book, he sounds passionately plaintive as he seeks to show Marxism's faults. His conscience hurts him.

Levy recalls Marx's statement that "religion is the opium of the people." Now he says "Marxism is the religion of our time," and thus has become the "opium of the people." No wonder the authoritative newspaper *Le Monde* says: "Here is a book that will create a scandal."

At 31, Levy must be the champion reader of modern time, at least in political philosophy. He lists 207 political thinkers as references. By far the majority are French. Only six are British and none American. A few are German, Italian, Greek, Russian and Chinese. Levy, like most of these, is not a general philosopher, but a political philosopher. There have been few such philosophers in America since New Deal days.



His prose is fairly readable, but it is hard to understand, mostly because he cites and quotes political writers with whom his American audience is unfamiliar.

The upheaval in Levy's thinking was caused by his reading of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, about Soviet political prisoner camps. With regard to the cruelty and oppression Solzhenitsyn revealed, Levy says: "Apply Marxism in any country you want, you will always find Gulag in the end."

If Levy had studied the roles of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, especially, in formulating the principles on which America was founded, he might not

be so hopeless about human society. Washington opposed political parties, warning that they would divide the country and damage democracy. Said Washington: "Let us not cater to the weaknesses and prejudices of the people. Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair."

Jefferson's championing of the freedom of the press and the people's right to know about public affairs was a lifelong project of his. He repeatedly said that if men had to choose between the existence of a free press and the existence of government, he would recommend the free press.

If there had been influential thinkers in America down through the years contin-

ually pressing for the Founding Fathers' ideals for the development of American society and government there might well be a more effective democracy today in the United States and other countries which looked to us for a political pattern.

Edgar Allan Poe, in 1846, said the "mob" would be the death of democracy in America. Today we see government by mob in public labor strikes, in mass public protests and demonstrations and a degeneration of Lincoln's "government of, by and for the people" into government for self by fraudulent elected and appointed officials, who set a pattern for those who get their living through burglarizing the people even to the point of kidnapping and terrorism.

Meantime, an educated electorate which the Founding Fathers fondly hoped would build a great, unselfish government has never been efficiently developed. Lawyers and judges are often seen trying to tear down the First Amendment's free-

press guarantee instead of working with the press to preserve and improve the operation of this right of the people. The press itself, with its new arms, has not always lived up to its responsibilities of thorough dissemination of the news and constructive comment on it.

In the principles urged by Washington and Jefferson, Bernard-Henri Levy might find hopeful possibilities for society if he and his political-philosopher class of thinkers would study these principles as intently as they study Marx, Engle and Nietzsche and their satellites.

Our country, plagued by waste, crime, hypocrisy, fraud, inefficient economics — a federal government almost a trillion dollars in debt, to say nothing of state and local governments — could well profit by the appearance of patriotic supercitizens who would give as thorough and conscientious attention to our problems as Bernard-Henri Levy has given to the problems he deals with in his book.