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AN ADVOCATE OF REVOLUTION

For most of his life, Herbert Marcuse worked in relative quiet as a Marxist philosopher and historian of ideas. Suddenly, in the past year or so, from the unlikely platform of the San Diego branch of the University of California, Marcuse has become almost famous. His identification with the young and avant garde has made him, in his own mocking words, "a rather salable piece of merchandise."

It is one of the more curious incongruities of our age that this 70-year-old, German-born and educated philosopher should have become a spokesman for rebellious Western youth, an articulate voice from across the generation for the anger of the affluent. The link began in 1964, when Marcuse's book, *One Dimensional Man*, was published coincidentally with the first stirrings of militancy among students in the U.S. and Western Europe.

"*One Dimensional Man*" is a difficult book, tortuously written and reasoned, and yet its central theme is simple, and easily transmissible by word of mouth: Modern industrial society is fundamentally repressive. The very comforts and alleged freedoms of politics and morality are part and parcel of the repression, devices to forestall substantive change.

This man of consummate professorial charm and a bearing of grandfatherly elegance speaks to a constituency of Mark Rudds, Daniel Cohn-Bendits and Rudi Dutschke when he writes,

AN ESSAY ON LIBERATION

By Herbert Marcuse

(Dutton Press, 91 pp., \$5.95)

Reviewed by Peter Osnos

Mr. Osnos, a Washington Post Staff Writer, was previously an editorial assistant for I. F. Stone's Weekly.

as in his new book, *An Essay on Liberation*: "The drive [behind the radical student movement] is the refusal to grow up, to mature, to perform efficiently and 'normally' in and for a society:

- "Which conducts its booming business on the backs of ghettos, slums and internal and external colonialism;

- "Which is infested with violence and repression while demanding obedience and compliance from victims of violence and repression;

- "Which in order to sustain the profitable productivity on which its hierarchy depends, utilizes its best resources for waste, destruction and an ever more methodical creation of conformist needs and satisfactions."

Marcuse is a pamphleteer, a passionate advocate of revolution as the only hope for change in a culture sodden with hypocrisy and injustice. He asks:

"Can one meaningfully call it an offense when demonstrators disrupt the business of the university, the draft board, the supermarket, the flow of traffic, to protest against the far more efficient disruption of the

business of life of untold human beings by the armed forces of law and order?"

This is persuasive argument in the abstract. But closer to home, is it not fair to ask whether there is any excuse for the purposeful violence like that of some young people who came to register their contempt for Richard Nixon's inaugural?

Is there any justification for surrounding a lone policeman and attacking him, apparently without reason?

No excuse for protest is necessary, Marcuse and his followers would retort. Legitimacy is irrelevant in a society which has sanctified destruction and glorified violence through the training of hundreds of thousands of men to maim and kill. "You are what you eat" was a frequent chant at the Counter Inaugural.

Marcuse has a plan. In *An Essay on Liberation*, he writes with what seems at times a beguiling naivete about the world he envisions to replace the society he abhors. It would be a world in which man was fundamentally, biologically overhauled.

For the first time in history, Marcuse argues, technological capabilities of advanced capitalism and socialism have made it possible to create needs and satisfactions that bind us to the system.

"Inasmuch as these needs and satisfactions reproduce a life in servitude," he writes, "liberation presupposes changes in this biological dimension, that is to say different instinctual needs, different reactions of the body as well as the mind."

Can the working classes be radicalized, Marcuse asks, so long as they feel the need to buy a new car every two years? The question is rhetorical. The answer, obviously, is no.

Once the biological changes are made, the bad habits broken, Marcuse sees a new quality of life developing, free of aggressive and repressive attitudes. This is the utopia: a distant goal, Marcuse concludes, closest perhaps in Cuba and North Vietnam.

An Essay on Liberation is an absorbing book, particularly when Marcuse dwells on his critique of contemporary society. But as literature the book suffers from the extravagant complexity of Marcuse's Germanic-American philosophical prose. And it is also worth mentioning that neither Marcuse nor his editors thought it worth the trouble to translate the French and German references in the text. It seems distinctly unrevolutionary to expect everyone who reads the book to be trilingual.

One is tempted to speculate about how the future will regard Marcuse. As another Marx? Or just a relic of the turbulent sixties? He himself must wonder as he ponders his success in a culture he condemns.

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Herbert Marcuse: Spokesman for the rebellious.

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