

Eric Hoffer - The True Believer (excerpts) 1951

Man would fain be great and sees that he is little; would fain be happy and sees that he is miserable; would fain be perfect and sees that he is full of imperfections; would fain be the object of the love and esteem of men, and sees that his faults merit only their aversion and contempt. The embarrassment wherein he finds himself produces in him the most unjust and criminal passions imaginable, for he conceives a mortal hatred against that truth which blames him and convinces him of his faults. —

PASCAL, Pensées

This book deals with some peculiarities common to all mass movements, be they religious movements, social revolutions or nationalist movements. It does not maintain that all movements are identical, but that they share certain essential characteristics which give them a family likeness. All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance;

They all appeal to the same types of mind. Though there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalist, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one. The same is true of the force which drives them on to expansion and world dominion. There is a certain uniformity in all types of dedication, of faith, of pursuit of power, of unity and of self-sacrifice. There are vast differences in the contents of holy causes and doctrines, but a certain uniformity in the factors which make them effective.

Starting out from the fact that the frustrated¹ predominate among the early adherents of all mass movements and that they usually join of their own accord, it is assumed: 1) that frustration of itself, without any proselytizing prompting from the outside, can generate most of the peculiar characteristics of the true believer; 2) that an effective technique of conversion consists basically in the inculcation and fixation of proclivities and responses indigenous to the frustrated mind.

It is necessary for most of us these days to have some insight into the motives and responses of the true believer. For though ours is a godless age, it is the very opposite of irreligious. The true believer is everywhere on the march, and both by converting and antagonizing he is shaping the world in his own image. And whether we are to line up with him or against him, it is well that we should know all we can concerning his nature and potentialities

It is perhaps not superfluous to add a word of caution.

The book passes no judgments, and expresses no preferences. It merely tries to explain; and the explanations— all of them theories—are in the nature of suggestions and arguments even when they are stated in what seems a categorical tone

It is a truism that many who join a rising revolutionary movement are attracted by the prospect of sudden and spectacular change in their conditions of life. A revolutionary movement is a conspicuous instrument of change.

In modern times, the mass movements involved in the realization of vast and rapid change are revolutionary and nationalist—singly or in combination. Peter the Great was probably the equal, in dedication, power and ruthlessness, of many of the most successful revolutionary or nationalist leaders. Yet he failed in his chief purpose, which was to turn Russia into a Western nation. And the reason he failed was that he did not infuse the Russian masses with some soul-stirring enthusiasm.

...was easily shoved aside by the masters of the art of "religiofication"—the art of turning practical purposes into holy causes. It is not difficult to see why America and Britain (or any Western democracy) could not play a direct and leading role in rousing the Asiatic countries from their backwardness and stagnation: the democracies are neither inclined nor perhaps able to kindle a revivalist spirit in Asia's millions. The contribution of the Western democracies to the awakening of the East has been indirect and certainly unintended. They have kindled an enthusiasm of resentment against the West; and it is this anti-Western fervor which is at present rousing the Orient from its stagnation of centuries...

There is in us a tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves. Success and failure are unavoidably related in our minds with the state of things around us. Hence it is that people with a sense of fulfillment think it a good world and would like to conserve it as it is, while the frustrated favor radical change. The tendency to look for all causes outside ourselves persists even when it is clear that our state of being is the product of personal qualities

Thus the resistance to change and the ardent desire for it spring from the same conviction, and the one can be as vehement as the other.

We counteract a deep feeling of insecurity by and the familiar. We counteract a deep feeling of insecurity by making of our existence a fixed routine. We hereby acquire the illusion that we have tamed the unpredictable.

It is a dangerous life we live when hunger and cold are at our heels.

For the hopeful can draw strength from the most ridiculous sources of power—a slogan, a word, a button.

Those who would transform a nation or the world cannot do so by breeding and captaining discontent or by demonstrating the reasonableness and desirability of the intended changes or by coercing people into a new way of life. They must know how to kindle and fan an extravagant hope.

As for the hopeful: it does not seem to make any difference who it is that is seized with a wild hope—whether it be an enthusiastic intellectual, a land-hungry farmer, a get-rich-quick speculator, a sober merchant or industrialist, a plain workingman or a noble lord—they all proceed recklessly with the present, wreck it if necessary, and create a new world.

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...a mass movement, particularly in its active, revivalist phase, appeals not to those intent on bolstering and advancing a cherished self, but to those who crave to be rid of an unwanted self. A mass movement attracts and holds a following not because it can satisfy the desire for self-advancement, but because it can satisfy the passion for self...

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The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, the more ready is he to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race or his holy cause.

A man is likely to mind his own business when it is worth minding. When it is not, he takes his mind off his own meaningless affairs by minding other people's business. This minding of other people's business expresses itself in gossip, snooping and meddling, and also in feverish interest in communal, national and racial affairs. In running away from ourselves we either fall on our neighbor's shoulder or fly at his throat.

Mass movements are usually accused of doping their followers with hope of the future while cheating them of the enjoyment of the present.

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All forms of dedication, devotion, loyalty and self-surrender are in essence a desperate clinging to something which might give worth and meaning to our futile, spoiled lives. Hence the embracing of a substitute will necessarily be passionate and extreme.

A substitute embraced in moderation cannot supplant and ease the self we want to forget.

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...all mass movements are interchangeable...

It is rare for a mass movement to be wholly of one character. Usually it displays some facets of other types of movement, and sometimes it is two or three movements in one.

In pre-war Italy and Germany practical businessmen acted in an entirely "logical" manner when they encouraged a Fascist and a Nazi movement in order to stop communism. But in doing so, these practical and logical people promoted their own liquidation.

The game of history is usually played by the best and the worst over the heads of the majority in the middle. Pg 24

We dare more when striving for superfluities than for necessities. Often when we renounce superfluities we end up lacking in necessities. Pg 30

It was not sheer hypocrisy when the rank-and-file Nazis declared themselves not guilty of all the enormities they had committed. They considered themselves cheated and maligned when made to shoulder responsibility for obeying orders. Had they not joined the Nazi movement in order to be free from responsibility? Pg 31

It would seem then that the most fertile ground for the propagation of a mass movement is a society with considerable freedom but lacking the palliatives of frustration. It was precisely because the

peasants of eighteenth century France, unlike the peasants of Germany and Austria, were no longer serfs and already owned land that they were receptive to the appeal of the French Revolution. Nor perhaps would there have been a Bolshevik revolution if the Russian peasant had not been free for a generation or more and had had a taste of the private ownership of land.

Those who see their lives as spoiled and wasted crave equality and fraternity more than they do freedom. If they clamor for freedom, it is but freedom to establish equality and uniformity. The passion for equality is partly a passion for anonymity: to be one thread of the many which make up a tunic; one thread not distinguishable from the others.¹² No one can then point us out, measure us against others and expose our inferiority. Pg 33

frustration. This is true of the poor artisan skilled in his trade and of the poor writer, artist and scientist in the full possession of creative powers. Nothing so bolsters our self-confidence and reconciles us with ourselves as the continuous ability to create; to see things grow and develop under our hand, day in, day out. The decline of handicrafts in modern times is perhaps one of the causes for the rise of frustration and the increased susceptibility of the individual to mass movements. It is impressive to observe how with a fading of the individual's creative powers there appears a pronounced inclination toward joining a mass movement. Pg 34

words of Khomiakov, "to the freedom of his own impotence."²⁰ The feverish desire to band together and coalesce into marching masses so manifest both in our homelands and in the countries we colonize is the expression of a desperate effort to escape this ineffectual, purposeless individual existence. Pg 39

Even when the type of solidarity is such that it cannot comprise the employer, it nevertheless tends to promote labor contentment and employer, it nevertheless tends to promote labor contentment and efficiency. Experience shows that production is at its best when the workers feel and act as members of a team. Any policy that disturbs and tears apart the team is bound to cause severe trouble. "Incentive wage plans that offer bonuses to individual workers do more harm than good.... Group incentive plans in which the bonus is based on the work of the whole team, including the foreman ... are much more likely to promote greater productivity and greater satisfaction on the part of the workers." Pages 40 and 41

A rising mass movement attracts and holds a following not by its doctrine and promises but by the refuge it offers from the anxieties, barrenness and meaninglessness of an individual existence. It cures the poignantly frustrated not by conferring on them an absolute truth or by remedying the difficulties and abuses which made their lives miserable, but by freeing them from their ineffectual selves— pg 41

The National Socialist movement, too, won out over all the other folkish movements which pullulated in the 1920's, because of Hitler's early recognition that a rising mass movement can never go too far in advocating and promoting collective cohesion. He knew that the chief passion of the frustrated is "to belong," and that there cannot be too much cementing and binding to satisfy this passion. Pg 42

Thus it is to be expected that the least and most successful of a minority bent on assimilation should be the most responsive to the appeal of a proselytizing mass movement pg 51

There is perhaps no more reliable indicator of a society's ripeness for a mass movement than the prevalence of unrelieved boredom. In almost all the descriptions of the periods preceding the rise of mass movements there is reference to vast ennui; and in their earliest stages mass movements are more likely to find sympathizers and support among the bored than among the exploited and oppressed. To a deliberate fomenter of mass upheavals, the report that people are bored still should be at least as encouraging as that they are suffering from intolerable economic or political abuses. Pg 51 and 52

Where people live autonomous lives and are not badly off, yet are without abilities or opportunities for creative work or useful action, there is no telling to what desperate and fantastic shifts they might resort in order to give meaning and purpose to their lives. Pg 52

The sardonic remark that patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels has also a less derogatory meaning. Fervent patriotism as well as religious and revolutionary enthusiasm often serves as a refuge from a guilty conscience pg 53

Here, as elsewhere, the technique of a mass movement aims to infect people with a malady and then offer the movement as a cure. "What a task confronts the American clergy -- pg 54

The vigor of a mass movement stems from the propensity of its followers for united action and self-sacrifice. When we ascribe the success of a movement to its faith, doctrine, propaganda, leadership, ruthlessness and so on, we are but referring to instruments of unification and to means used to inculcate a readiness for self-sacrifice. It is perhaps impossible to understand the nature of mass movements unless it is recognized that their chief preoccupation is to foster, perfect and perpetuate a facility for united action and self-sacrifice. To know the processes by which such a facility is engendered is to grasp the inner logic of most of the characteristic attitudes and practices of an active mass movement-- pg 58

The same is true of religious and revolutionary organizations: whether or not they develop into mass movements depends less on the doctrine they preach and the program they project than on the degree of their preoccupation with unity and the readiness for self- degree of their preoccupation with unity and the readiness for self sacrifice -- pg 59

Such diverse phenomena as a deprecation of the present, a facility for make-believe, a proneness to hate, a readiness to imitate, credulity, a readiness to attempt the impossible, and many others which crowd the minds of the intensely frustrated are, as we shall see, unifying agents and prompters of recklessness – pg 59

In short, we shall try to show that the technique of an active mass movement consists basically in the inculcation and cultivation of proclivities and responses indigenous to the frustrated mind. Pg 60

The technique of fostering a readiness to fight and to die consists in separating the individual from his flesh-and-blood self—in not allowing him to be his real self. This can be achieved by the thorough assimilation of the individual into a compact collective body—Sections 44–46; by endowing him with an imaginary self (make-believe)—Section 47; by implanting in him a deprecating attitude toward the present and riveting his interest on things that are not yet—Sections 48–55; by interposing a fact-proof screen are not yet—Sections 48–55; by interposing a fact-proof screen between him and reality (doctrine)—Sections 56–59; by preventing, through the injection of passions, the establishment of a stable equilibrium between the individual and his self (fanaticism) pg 61

To ripen a person for self-sacrifice he must be stripped of his individual identity and distinctness. He must cease to be George, Hans, Ivan, or Tadao—a human atom with an existence bounded by birth and death. The most drastic way to achieve this end is by the complete assimilation of the individual into a collective body. The fully assimilated individual does not see himself and others as human beings. When asked who he is, his automatic response is that he is a German, a Russian, a Japanese, a Christian, a Moslem, a member of a certain tribe or family. He has no purpose, worth and destiny apart from his collective body; and as long as that body lives he cannot really die pg 62

The effacement of individual separateness must be thorough. In every act, however trivial, the individual must by some ritual associate himself with the congregation, the tribe, the party, etcetera. His joys and sorrows, his pride and confidence must spring from the fortunes and capacities of the group rather than from his individual prospects and abilities. Above all, he must never feel alone. Though stranded on a desert island, he must still feel that he is under the eyes of the group. To be cast out from the group should be equivalent to being cut off from life pg 63

These old Bolsheviks had long ago cut themselves off from humanity outside Russia. They had an unbounded contempt for the past and for history which could still be made by capitalistic humanity. They had renounced God. There was for them neither past nor future, neither memory nor glory outside the confines of holy Russia and the Communist party—and both these were now wholly and irrevocably in Stalin's hands. They felt themselves, in the words of Bukharin, "isolated from everything that constitutes the essence of life." So they confessed. By humbling themselves before the congregation of the faithful they broke out of their isolation. They renewed their communion with the eternal whole by reviling the self, accusing it of monstrous and spectacular crimes and sloughing it off in public. Pg 65

...since Hitler had managed to exterminate six million Jews without meeting serious resistance, it should not be too difficult to handle the 600,000 Jews pg 65

The theoreticians in the Kremlin are probably aware that in order to maintain the submissiveness of the Russian masses there must not be the least chance of an identification with any collective body outside Russia. The purpose of the Iron Curtain is perhaps more to prevent the Russian people from reaching out—even in thought— toward an outside world, than to prevent the infiltration of spies and saboteurs. The curtain is both physical and psychological. The complete elimination of any chance of emigration—even of Russian citizens married to foreigners—blurs the awareness of outside humanity in Russian minds. One might as well dream and hope of escaping to another planet. The psychological barrier is equally important: the Kremlin's brazen propaganda strives to impress upon the Russians that there is nothing worthy and eternal, nothing deserving of admiration and reverence, nothing worth identifying oneself with, outside the confines of holy Russia. Pg 66

The very impracticability of many of the goals which a mass movement sets itself is part of the campaign against the present. All movement sets itself is part of the campaign against the present. All that is practicable, feasible and possible is part of the present. To offer something practicable would be to increase the promise of the present and reconcile us with it --pg 69

All mass movements deprecate the present by depicting it as a mean preliminary to a glorious future; a mere doormat on the threshold of the millennium. To a religious movement the present is a place of exile, a vale of tears leading to the heavenly kingdom; to a social revolution it is a mean way station on the road to Utopia; to a nationalist movement it is an ignoble episode preceding the final triumph pg 60

A glorification of the past can serve as a means to belittle the present. But unless joined with sanguine expectations of the future, an exaggerated view of the past results in an attitude of caution and not in the reckless strivings of a mass movement. On the other hand, there is no more potent dwarfing of the present than by viewing it as a mere link between a glorious past and a glorious future. Thus, though a mass movement at first turns its back on the past, it eventually develops a vivid awareness, often specious, of a distant glorious past. Religious movements go back to the day of creation; social

revolutions tell of a golden age when men were free, equal and independent; nationalist movements revive or invent memories of past greatness. This preoccupation with the past stems not only from a desire to demonstrate the legitimacy of the stems not only from a desire to demonstrate the legitimacy of the movement and the illegitimacy of the old order, but also to show up the present as a mere interlude between past and future pg 72

An historical awareness also imparts a sense of continuity. Possessed of a vivid vision of past and future, the true believer sees himself part of something that stretches endlessly backward and forward—something eternal. He can let go of the present (and of his own life) not only because it is a poor thing, hardly worth hanging on to, but also because it is not the beginning and the end of all things. Furthermore, a vivid awareness of past and future robs the present of its reality pg 72

A deprecating attitude toward the present fosters a capacity for prognostication. The well-adjusted make poor prophets. On the other hand, those who are at war with the present have an eye for the seeds of change and the potentialities of small beginnings -- pg 72

The means, also, a mass movement uses to make the present unpalatable (Section 48) strike a responsive chord in the frustrated. The self-mastery needed in overcoming their appetites gives them an illusion of strength. They feel that in mastering themselves they have mastered the world. The mass movement's advocacy of the impracticable and impossible also agrees with their taste. Those who fail in everyday affairs show a tendency to reach out for the impossible. It is a device to camouflage their shortcomings. For when we fail in attempting the possible, the blame is solely ours; but when we fail in attempting the impossible, we are justified in attributing it to the magnitude of the task. There is less risk in being discredited when trying the impossible than when trying the possible. It is thus that failure in everyday affairs often breeds an extravagant audacity. Pg 75

One gains the impression that the frustrated derive as much satisfaction—if not more—from the means a mass movement uses as from the ends it advocates. The delight of the frustrated in chaos and in the downfall of the fortunate and prosperous does not spring from an ecstatic awareness that they are clearing the ground for the heavenly city. In their fanatical cry of "all or nothing at all" the second alternative echoes perhaps a more ardent wish than the first. Pg 76

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It is the true believer's ability to "shut his eyes and stop his ears" to facts that do not deserve to be either seen or heard which is the source of his unequalled fortitude and constancy. He cannot be frightened by danger nor disheartened by obstacles ...or...by contradictions because he denies their existence. Strength of faith, as Bergson pointed out, manifests itself not in moving mountains but in not seeing mountains to move.¹³ And it is the certitude of his infallible doctrine that renders the true believer impervious to the infallible doctrine that renders the true believer impervious to the uncertainties, surprises and the unpleasant realities of the world around him. Thus the effectiveness of a doctrine should not be judged by its profundity, sublimity or the validity of the truths it embodies, but by how thoroughly it insulates the individual from his self and the world as it is. What Pascal said of an effective religion is true of any effective doctrine: it must be "contrary to nature, to common sense and to pleasure." Pg 80

The effectiveness of a doctrine does not come from its meaning but from its certitude. No doctrine however profound and sublime will be effective unless it is presented as the embodiment of the one and only truth. It must be the one word from which all things are and all things speak.¹⁵ Crude absurdities, trivial nonsense and sublime truths are equally potent in readying people for self-sacrifice if they are accepted as the sole, eternal truth. It is obvious, therefore, that in order to be effective a doctrine must not be understood, but has rather to be believed in. We can be absolutely certain only about things we do not understand. A doctrine that is understood is shorn of its strength. Once we understand a thing, it is as if it had originated in us. And, clearly, those who are asked to renounce the self and sacrifice it cannot see eternal certitude in anything which originates in that self. The fact that they understand a thing fully impairs its validity and certitude in their eyes. The devout are always urged to seek the absolute truth with their hearts and not their minds. "It is the heart which is conscious of God, not the reason."¹⁶ Rudolph Hess, when swearing in the entire Nazi party in 1934, exhorted his hearers: "Do not seek Adolph Hitler with your brains; all of you will find him with the strength of your hearts."¹⁷ When a movement begins to rationalize its doctrine and make it intelligible, it is a sign that its dynamic span is over; pg 81

There is thus an illiterate air about the most literate true believer. He seems to use words as if he were ignorant of their true meaning. Hence, too, his taste for quibbling, hair-splitting and scholastic tortuousness -- pg 81

To be in possession of an absolute truth is to have a net of familiarity spread over the whole of eternity. There are no surprises and no unknowns. All questions have already been answered, all decisions made, all eventualities foreseen. The true believer is without wonder and hesitation. "Who knows Jesus knows the reason of all things."¹⁸ The true doctrine is a master key to all the world's problems. With it the world can be taken apart and put together... history of the Communist party states: "The power of Marxist-Leninist theory lies in the fact that it enables the Party to -nd the right orientation in any situation, to understand the inner connection of current events, to foresee their course, and to perceive not only how and in what direction they are developing in the present but how and in what direction they are bound to develop in the future."¹⁹ The true believer is emboldened to attempt the unprecedented and the impossible not only because his doctrine gives him a sense of omnipotence but

also because it gives him unqualified confidence in the future. (See Section 4.) An active mass movement rejects the present and centers its interest on the future. It is from this attitude that it derives its strength, for it can proceed recklessly with the present—with the health, wealth and lives of its followers. But it must act as if had already read the book of the future to the last word. Its doctrine is proclaimed as a key to that book. Pg 82

It was suggested in Section 1 that mass movements are often necessary for the realization of drastic and abrupt changes. It seems necessary for the realization of drastic and abrupt changes. It seems strange that even practical and desirable changes, such as the renovation of stagnant societies, should require for their realization an atmosphere of intense passion and should have to be accompanied by all the faults and follies of an active mass movement -- pg 83

The human plasticity necessary for the realization of drastic and abrupt changes seems, therefore, to be a byproduct of the process of unification and of the inculcation of a readiness for self-sacrifice. The important point is that the estrangement from the self, which is a precondition for both plasticity and conversion, almost always proceeds in an atmosphere of intense passion. For not only is the stirring of passion an effective means of upsetting an established equilibrium between a man and his self, but it is also the inevitable by-product of such an upsetting. Pg 84

By kindling and fanning violent passions in the hearts of their followers, mass movements prevent the settling of an inner balance pg 84

The fanatic is perpetually incomplete and insecure. He cannot generate self-assurance out of his individual resources—out of his rejected self—but finds it only by clinging passionately to whatever support he happens to embrace. This passionate attachment is the essence of his blind devotion and religiosity, and he sees in it the source of all virtue and strength. Though his single-minded dedication is a holding on for dear life, he easily sees himself as the supporter and defender of the holy cause to which he clings. And he is ready to sacrifice his life to demonstrate to himself and others that such indeed is his role. He sacrifices his life to prove his worth pg 85

And it is easier for a fanatic Communist to be converted to fascism, chauvinism or Catholicism than to become a sober liberal. Pg 86

Most of the traitors in the Second World War came from the extreme right. "There seems to be a thin line between violent, extreme nationalism and treason." Pg 86

Thus the millions of ex-fanatics in defeated Germany and Japan are more responsive to the preaching of communism and militant Catholicism than to the teaching of the democratic way of life. The greater success of Communist propaganda in this case is not due to its superior technique but to the peculiar bias of the once fanatical Germans and Japanese. The spokesmen of democracy offer no holy cause to cling to and no corporate whole to lose oneself in. Communist Russia can easily turn Japanese war prisoners into fanatical Communists, while no American propaganda, however subtle and perfect, can turn them into freedom-loving democrats. Pg 87

When a mass movement begins to be preoccupied with the present, it means that it has arrived. It ceases then to be a movement and becomes an institutionalized organization—an established church, a government or an army (of soldiers or workers). The popular army, which is often an end-product of a mass movement, retains many of the trappings of the movement—pious verbiage, slogans, holy symbols; but like any other army it is held together less by faith and enthusiasm than by the unimpassioned mechanism of drill, esprit de corps and coercion. It soon loses the asceticism and function of a holy congregation and displays the boisterousness and the taste for the joys of the present which is characteristic of all armies. Being an instrument of the present, an army deals mainly with the possible. Its leaders do not rely on miracles. Even when animated by fervent faith, they are open to compromise. They reckon with the possibility of defeat and know how to surrender. On the other hand, the leader of a mass movement has an overwhelming contempt for the present—for all its stubborn facts and perplexities, even those of geography and the weather. He relies on miracles. His hatred of the present (his nihilism) comes to the fore when the situation becomes desperate. He destroys his country and his people rather than surrender. The spirit of self-sacrifice within an army is fostered by devotion to duty, make-believe, esprit de corps, drill, faith in a leader, sportsmanship, the spirit of adventure and the desire for glory. These factors, unlike those employed by a mass movement, do not spring from a deprecation of the present and a revulsion from an unwanted self. They can unfold therefore in a sober atmosphere -- pg 89

Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying agents. It pulls and whirls the individual away from his own self, makes him oblivious of his weal and future, frees him of jealousies and self-seeking. pg 91

Finally, it seems, the ideal devil is a foreigner. To qualify as a devil, a domestic enemy must be given a foreign ancestry. Hitler found it easy to brand the German Jews as foreigners. The Russian revolutionary agitators emphasized the foreign origin (Varangian, Tartar, Western) of the Russian aristocracy.⁸ In the French Revolution the aristocrats were seen as “descendants of barbarous Germans, while French commoners were descendants of civilized Gauls and Romans.”⁹ In the Puritan Revolution the royalists “were labeled ‘Normans,’ descendants of a group of foreign invaders. Pg 93

We do not usually look for allies when we love. Indeed, we often look on those who love with us as rivals and trespassers. But we always look for allies when we hate. It is understandable that we should look for others to side with us when we have a just grievance and crave to retaliate against those who wronged us. The puzzling thing is that when our hatred does not spring from a visible grievance and does not seem justified the desire for allies becomes more pressing. It is chiefly the unreasonable hatreds that drive us to merge with those who hate as we do, and it is this kind of hatred that serves as one of the most effective cementing agents. Whence come these unreasonable hatreds, and why their unifying effect? They are an expression of a desperate effort to suppress an awareness of our inadequacy, worthlessness, guilt and other shortcomings of the self. Self-contempt is here transmuted into hatred of others—and there is a most determined and persistent effort to mask this switch. Obviously, the most effective way of doing this is to find others who hate... pg 94

There is perhaps no surer way of infecting ourselves with virulent hatred toward a person than by doing him a grave injustice. That others have a just grievance against us is a more potent reason for hating them than that we have a just grievance against them. We do not make people humble and meek when we show them their guilt and cause them to be ashamed of themselves pg 95

The most effective way to silence our guilty conscience is to convince ourselves and others that those we have sinned against are indeed depraved creatures, deserving every punishment, even extermination. We cannot pity those we have wronged, nor can we be indifferent toward them. We must hate and persecute them or else leave the door open to self-contempt pg 95

The Jacobins practiced all the evils of the tyranny they had risen against. Soviet Russia is realizing the purest and most colossal example of monopolistic capitalism. Hitler took the Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion for his guide and textbook; he followed them “down to the veriest detail. Pg 97

Hitler, who sensed the undercurrent of admiration in hatred, drew a remarkable conclusion. It is of the utmost importance, he drew a remarkable conclusion. It is of the utmost importance, he said, that the National Socialist should seek and deserve the violent hatred of his enemies. Such hatred would be proof of the superiority of the National Socialist faith. “The best yardstick for the value of his [the National Socialist’s] attitude, for the sincerity of his conviction, and the force of his will is the hostility he receives from the ... enemy. Pg 97

Passionate hatred can give meaning and purpose to an empty life. Thus people haunted by the purposelessness of their lives try...nursing a fanatical grievance... pg 98

The act of self-denial seems to confer on us the right to be harsh and merciless toward others. Pg 99

There is no telling to what extremes of cruelty and ruthlessness a man will go when he is freed from the fears, hesitations, doubts and the vague stirrings of decency that go with individual judgment...Hitler had a contemptuous opinion of the brutality of the autonomous individual. Pg 100

When we see the bloodshed, terror and destruction born of such generous enthusiasms as the love of God, love of Christ, love of a nation, compassion for the oppressed and so on, we usually blame this shameful perversion on a cynical, power-hungry leadership. Actually, it is the unification set in motion...transmutes noble impulses into a reality of hatred ...deindividuation...is a prerequisite...

pg 100

Imitation is an essential unifying agent. The development of a close-knit group is inconceivable without a diffusion of uniformity. The one-mindedness and Gleichschaltung prized by every mass movement are achieved as much by imitation as by obedience. Obedience itself consists as much in the imitation of an example as in the following of a precept -- pg 101

The situation is not unlike that observed in children and undifferentiated adults where the lack of a distinct individuality leaves the mind without guards against the intrusion of influences from without.

Pg 102

The marked imitativeness of primitive people is perhaps due less to their primitiveness than to the fact that they are usually members of compact clans or tribes...pg 103

Contempt for the outside world is of course the most effective defense against disruptive imitation. However, an active mass movement prizes hatred above passive contempt..pg 104

We tend today to exaggerate the effectiveness of persuasion as a means of inculcating opinion and shaping behavior. We see in propaganda a formidable instrument. To its skillful use we attribute many of the startling successes of the mass movements of our time, and we have come to fear the word as much as the sword. Pg 105

The truth seems to be that propaganda on its own cannot force its way into unwilling minds; neither can it inculcate something wholly new; nor can it keep people persuaded once they have ceased to believe. It penetrates only into minds already open...justifies opinions already present...pg 105

Indeed, it is easier for the frustrated to detect their own imaginings and hear the echo of their own musings in impassioned double-talk and sonorous refrains than in precise words joined together with faultless logic pg 106

Contrary to what one would expect, propaganda becomes more fervent and importunate when it operates in conjunction with coercion than when it has to rely solely on its own effectiveness -- pg 106

Thus coercion when implacable and persistent has an unequalled persuasiveness, and this not only with simple souls but also with those who pride themselves on the strength and integrity of their intellect. When an arbitrary decree from the Kremlin forces scientists, writers, and artists to recant their convictions and confess their errors, the chances are that such recantations and confessions represent genuine conversions rather than lip service. It needs fanatical faith to rationalize our cowardice. Pg 108

The proselytizing fanatic strengthens his own faith by converting others-- pg 110

No matter how vital we think the role of leadership in the rise of a mass movement, there is no doubt that the leader cannot create the conditions which make the rise of a movement possible. He cannot conjure a movement out of the void. There has to be an eagerness to follow and obey, and an intense dissatisfaction with things as they are, before movement and leader can make their appearance. When conditions are not ripe, the potential leader, no matter how gifted, and his holy cause, no matter how potent, remain without a following. The First World War and its aftermath readied the ground for the rise of the Bolshevik, Fascist and Nazi movements ... pg 113

Exceptional intelligence, noble character and originality seem neither indispensable nor perhaps desirable. The main requirements seem to be...a capacity for passionate hatred pg 114

The quality of ideas seems to play a minor role in mass movement leadership. What counts is the arrogant gesture, the complete disregard of the opinion of others, the singlehanded defiance of the world. Pg 116

There can be no mass movement without some deliberate misrepresentation of facts. No solid, tangible advantage can hold a following and make it zealous and loyal unto death. The leader has to be practical and a realist, yet must talk the language of the visionary and the idealist. Pg 116

Originality is not a prerequisite of great mass movement leadership. One of the most striking traits of the successful mass movement leader is his readiness to imitate both friend and foe, both past and contemporary models -- pg 117

We have seen that the acrid secretion of the frustrated mind, though composed chiefly of fear and ill will, acts yet as a marvelous slime to cement the embittered and disaffected into one compact whole. Suspicion too is an ingredient of this acrid slime, and it too can act as a unifying agent -- pg 124

Thus mutual suspicion within the ranks is not only compatible with corporate strength, but, one might almost say, a precondition of it. "Men of strong convictions and strong passions, when leagued together, watch one another with suspicion...pg 125

By elevating dogma above reason, the individual's intelligence is prevented from becoming self-reliant

■ pg 126

Ruthless censorship of literature, art, music and science prevents even the creative few from living self-sufficient lives. The inculcated devotions to church, party, country, leader and creed also perpetuate a state of incompleteness --pg 128

Mass movements do not usually rise until the prevailing order has been discredited. The discrediting is not an automatic result of the blunders and abuses of those in power, but the deliberate work of men of words with a grievance -- pg132

A full-blown mass movement is a ruthless affair, and its management is in the hands of ruthless fanatics who use words only to give an appearance of spontaneity to a consent obtained by coercion. But these fanatics can move in and take charge only after the prevailing order has been discredited and has lost the allegiance of the masses -- pg 130

Nero, who was extravagant in his admiration of Hellas, was welcomed hysterically by the Greeks on his visit in 67 A.D. They took him to their hearts as a fellow intellectual and artist. "To gratify him, all the games had been crowded into a single year. All the cities sent him the prizes of their contests. Committees were continually waiting on him, to beg him to go and sing at every place."12 And he in turn loaded them with privileges and proclaimed the freedom of Greece -- pg 135

In both the Bolshevik and the Nazi regimes there is evident an acute awareness of the fateful relation between men of words and the state. In Russia, men of letters, artists and scholars share the privileges

of the ruling group. They are all superior civil servants. And though made to toe the party line, they are but subject to the same discipline imposed on the rest of the elite. In the case of Hitler there was a diabolical realism in his plan to make all learning the monopoly of the elite which was to rule his envisioned world empire and keep the anonymous masses barely literate -- pg 137

A wide diffusion of doubt and irreverence thus leads often to unexpected results. The irreverence of the Renaissance was a prelude to the new fanaticism of Reformation and Counter Reformation. The Frenchmen of the enlightenment who debunked the church and the crown and preached reason and tolerance released a burst of revolutionary and nationalist fanaticism which has not abated yet. Marx and his followers discredited religion, nationalism and the passionate pursuit of business, and brought into being the new fanaticism of socialism, communism, Stalinist nationalism and the passion for world dominion -- pg 139

To sum up, the militant man of words prepares the ground for the rise of a mass movement: 1) by discrediting prevailing creeds and institutions and detaching from them the allegiance of the people; 2) by indirectly creating a hunger for faith in the hearts of those who cannot live without it, so that when the new faith is preached it finds an eager response among the disillusioned masses; 3) by furnishing the doctrine and the slogans of the new faith; 4) by undermining the convictions of the "better people"—those who can get along without faith—so that when the new fanaticism makes its appearance they are without the capacity to resist it. They see no sense in dying for convictions and principles, and yield to the new order without a fight – pg 140

The fact that mass movements as they arise often manifest less individual freedom¹⁸ than the order they supplant, is usually ascribed to the trickery of a power-hungry clique that kidnaps the movement at a critical stage and cheats the masses of the freedom about to dawn – pg 141

Whence come the fanatics? Mostly from the ranks of the noncreative men of words. The most significant division between men of words is between those who can find fulfillment in creative work and those who cannot. The creative man of words, no matter how bitterly he may criticize and deride the existing order, is actually attached to the present. His passion is to reform and not to destroy. When the mass movement remains wholly in his keeping, he turns it into a mild affair -- pg 144

he cannot settle down. Once victory has been won and the new order begins to crystallize, the fanatic becomes an element of strain and disruption. The taste for strong feeling drives him on to search for mysteries yet to be revealed and secret doors yet to be opened. He keeps groping for extremes

■ pg 146

When the same person or persons (or the same type of person) leads a movement from its inception to maturity, it usually ends in disaster. The Fascist and Nazi movements were without a successive change in leadership, and both ended in disaster. It was Hitler's fanaticism, his inability to settle down and play the role of a practical man of action, which brought ruin to his movement -- pg 147

