

# 'And so, without quite realizing My Hard Road from

By John R. Coyne Jr.  
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A FEW months ago I went back to Berkeley to look for myself. Somewhere between 1967 and 1976 I'd left a large piece of myself somewhere. I thought I might find it at Berkeley, for it was because of Berkeley that I went to work for Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon.

It's all over there now. Berkeley is as off-beat and funky as ever. But the hate has evaporated. And in a remarkable way, Richard Nixon has succeeded in accomplishing precisely what he was elected to accomplish — he has calmed the nation.

No more mass demonstrations, no more confrontations, no more fire-bombs. It's almost as if Nixon drew all the hatred of a decade into himself and then pushed the self-destruct button.

It's not that Berkeley has been deradicalized. It still is and always will be the radical capital of the nation. It's hard to believe that it was just a bit more than a decade ago that the Free Speech Movement was born in Berkeley, a movement that fathered the New Left and by so doing altered permanently the face of American politics, the shape of America's universities, and the terms of our national dialogue.

The New Leftists didn't get everything they wanted. But they certainly fared better than the people on my side. They have, to a significant extent, managed to get their ideas and attitudes institutionalized into the Democratic party. Their movement was responsible, more than any other single factor, for ending our involvement in Vietnam. They drove one Democratic President from office and ironically, elected Richard Nixon, who could not have beaten Hubert Humphrey in 1968 without the demonstrations in the streets of Chicago.

Without the New Left there would have been no outraged cry from Middle Americans for the restoration of order. Without the New Left hundreds of thousands of traditional Democrats would not have crossed over to vote for the law-and-order Nixon-Agnew ticket. Without the New Left there would have been no Nixon-Agnew Administration, no Haldeman, no Ehrlichman, no Mitchell, no Huston plan, no Watergate. And without the New Left I know that I would not within the space of one year have worked for two vice presidents and two presidents.

But it's all over for them and for thousands like me now. I know that I'll never again set off in search of that cause larger than self that Haldeman liked to recommend. And I am certain that I will never again take any politician at face value.

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MY EXPERIENCE has been primarily with presidents and vice presidents. And presidents and vice presidents are the most carefully prepared, packaged and protected political products on the market today. Their daily lives are arranged to the minute by scheduling staffs. There are the speech writers, whose work I know best, whose function it is in part to translate policies into coherent English so that the president, having been informed of them, can read them to the nation.

My experience as a speech writer has taught me that national politicians often have

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little to do with what they say. And this in turn has taught me that it is nearly impossible to arrive at conclusions about the reality of the political man beneath the surface of his rhetoric, or conclusions about the principles to which that man holds, by analyzing his rhetoric.

During the disastrous Congressional campaign of '74, when President Ford broke out of the White House and raced across the country speaking for every Republican in sight, he never knew what to say next, and neither did the four of us who did the bulk of the writing for him. The theme that Ford finally came up with was the need to preserve the two-party system, a theme that had been developed in an earlier unused speech.

The theme does make basic sense, of course. No one wants one-party rule. But as we laid it out it sounded just a bit fatuous. Under one-party rule, we said massive abuse of power becomes possible. Therefore, in order to prevent abuse of power, it was necessary to send Republicans to Washington. But since it was a Republican administration that had demonstrated spectacularly just how dramatically power could be abused, the idea had a certain hollow ring.

We were adrift. The pudding had no theme, the rhetoric was just rhetoric. And so, because there was nothing to say, Ford began to ramble and babble, picking up some of the prepared remarks, garbling others, speaking almost incoherently for as long as 45 minutes, pushing against the outer limits of the rhetorical

barrier, hoping desperately to break through into some sphere of sense and ideas. But he didn't, and the problem will remain for as long as the Republican party continues to drift without distinctive and well-thought-out programs and without philosophical ballast.

I don't intend here to leave the impression that I believe Ford can't think and talk. He can, and the first two speeches he gave upon assuming the Presidency were among the most quietly eloquent of the past few decades. But they were personal speeches, the speeches of a good and decent man responding to Watergate and affirming his faith in the basic goodness and decency of our nation and its people.

But the problem arises in the later speeches, when he attempts to lay down the goals, programs, policies and philosophy of the Administration he heads and the party he leads. As the '74 elections demonstrated, the Republican party may be well on its way to earning





**Art Goldberg addressed a crowd in Sproul Plaza from the roof of a trapped police car at the beginning of the Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley in October 1964**



endangered species status.

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THE BLAME has to rest, of course, with the Nixon-Agnew administration and all of us

who worked for the administration. I make no apologies here. I went to work for Agnew because he personified for me "the old American verities." And when I went to work for Nixon, believing firmly that he had dealt kindly with Agnew I did so certain that although Nixon was a mean, tough, hardball politician, he was nevertheless a man of great personal rectitude. No apologies. But I wouldn't do it again.

In the late '60's, I still believed firmly that social and moral conservative principles could be joined to political principles and combined in the person of a national politician. That politician became, for me and million of others, Spiro Agnew. It crystalized for me because of the condition of the American university and the New Left. I had come to Berkeley at a time when confrontation had become an accepted part of daily life. The demonstrations and riots which had begun on the campuses had spilled out into the cities.

In the nation the unrest was reaching new heights. The President, a prisoner in the White House, could no longer appear publicly in any

sizable city, and would soon be forced to announce that he would not run again. The mobs were marching on Washington and the government seemed no longer to function. Robert Kennedy was murdered. Martin Luther King was murdered. And to many of us it seemed the country was coming unglued.

As the '60's wore on we came more and more to believe that the social unrest and the collapse of traditional morality was the logical outcome of the neo-liberal philosophy that had evolved in our century, an eclectic intellectual mixture of Marxism, Freudianism and Darwinism, a philosophy that was preached unthinkingly in the classroom and that had led, inevitably, to the birth of the New Left movement.

My own beliefs were simple, perhaps naive. I believed in all those values that Agnew used to like to say "made America the hope and envy of the world." I believed patriotism to be one of the highest of those virtues. I believed our government and our political system to be the finest yet devised by man, and I believed absolutely that the men charged with running our government and our political system were sincere and totally dedicated men who, no matter what their idiosyncracies, could be trusted to do their very best for their country.

I believed it all, and I grew profoundly uneasy as I watched the rapid growth of a movement apparently dedicated to destroying that system and replacing it with a new neo-Marxian collectivist system modeled vaguely on Fidelist and Maoist principles. I didn't want to live in such a society and I didn't want my children growing up in it. And so, without quite realizing it — I was relatively apolitical, had voted for J.F.K. in 1960 and might have voted for Bobby had he lived — I became a counter-revolutionary.

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THE PROCESS at Berkeley, of course, commonly worked the other way. Middle-class students arrived on campus still instinctively clutching to them most of the ideas and values they'd grown up with. But after a couple of years of steady attacks on those ideas and values by the professors who taught them ("middle-class morality," they'd snort, as if having delivered themselves of the ultimate obscenity), they finally collapsed, leaving a vacuum into which rushed a whole new set of values, those espoused by their radicalized peers.

For a few of us, however, perhaps because we were veterans, it all had the opposite effect, for we believed that revolution was not only possible but very likely inevitable. And of course we lost on all fronts. The New Left won in the universities. They didn't *destroy* the universities, but they demonstrated just how bankrupt the universities were, and by so doing they forced them to commit public suicide. And precisely the same thing happened to our government.

Again, that isn't to say the New Left *caused* massive abuse of power. The potential for those abuses had been building steadily as government came increasingly to rule rather than represent, and as our rulers became increasingly cut off from their subjects.

The New Left didn't cause Watergate. But it acted as catalyst. The dam broke, and we suddenly realized that the same thing was true of our massive government that was true of our massive universities — structures without substance, run by men without centers. And so, those of us who set out to defend our universities and government found we had nothing to fight for.

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ARE WE finished? I don't know. But it is now obvious that the illness at the center of our system — or perhaps a lack of center — is symptomatic of a much deeper sickness. The old values are still there, just as immutable as ever. But somewhere we seem to have forgotten how to apply them, as we once did, to life. And this more than anything else dramatizes the failure of higher education in America.

Perhaps we can still pull it out. If we can find a way to re-establish the proper relationships between students and teachers, between representatives and the people they represent, between ideas and action, philosophy and politics, values and life — then we might make it. But it's getting late.

John R. Coyne Jr., a contributor to the *National Review* and author of "The Impudent Snobs: Agnew vs. the Intellectual Establishment," made this presentation, adapted here, at Hillsdale College in Michigan. This is reprinted from *Imprimis*, a Hillsdale publication.