

# Early Companions

A Novella

Werner Cohn

For Rita

My mother thought highly of the classics. Schiller and Goethe were classics to her, as well as Shakespeare. I don't read literature of that kind, so I cannot say whether such books make good reading. But I have been impressed by the title of one of Goethe's works, which I understand is autobiographical: *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 'Fiction and Truth'. That is what I am doing here, fiction and truth, all fiction and all truth.

## Kurt Blum

When I was four, or five maybe, Kurt was in my group in playschool. This was Berlin in 1930, 1931. A Jewish lady, *Frau Doktor* something or other, owned the school. The title *Frau Doktor* meant that her husband, like my mother's, was a physician. It was the family of a *Kollege*, a colleague.

Kurt was my "best friend" then and for the next few years. In playschool he was also my adversary because we got into fights and wrestle one another to the ground. Sixty-five years later we were both in the United States, we both knew where the other was. We had spoken on the phone exactly three times, but we never again laid eyes on one another since the time I left Berlin in 1938.

But a picture of the playgroup hangs in my living room now. I am between Kurt and his brother Guenther. I had this picture enlarged and framed, sending another framed print to Kurt in Florida. That occasioned one of the three phone calls, but there was nothing else.

My life in the playgroup has largely receded from my memory. We learned how to tie shoes; we played in a playground next to a huge Protestant church. The church was down the street from a little post office, the one in which I first encountered Gypsies. The lady who directed the playschool and her assistants

were kind and helpful, in contrast to conditions in the Prussian school to which I was soon consigned.

By the time I was enrolled in this public school, at about the time that Hitler took power, we had moved from a walk-up apartment on *Lessing Strasse* in the Hansa neighborhood to somewhat more respectable quarters on *Bundesrat Ufer*. It was in these days that my cousin Heinz Lehrer, two years older than I, spent some time with us because his father had just died of cancer. Death by cancer of a young Jew was still a great tragedy. It was just a few years later that such a death, in the loving bosom of family, would be considered a privilege of happier times.

My cousin Heinz was fated to die young of cancer, like his father, but that was some thirty years later, in Philadelphia, long after the Holocaust had run its course.

In this apartment on *Bundesrat Ufer*, his father just having died, Heinz was my guide in play. He was gifted in drawing and was able to produce a picture of our block, replete with swastika flags flying from apartment buildings. It is important to be realistic in your art; he explained to me, and the adults all paid attention to his precocity. Anna, the maid, reproached him for his unseemly exuberance with his father's body still warm. Anna, he said with defiance, I can talk loudly now because the funeral will not go on for some hours.

Heinz Lehrer was my only Berlin cousin, that is to say my only cousin on my father's side. But I also had four Stettin cousins, sons of my mother's sisters. The oldest was another Heinz, Heinz Gruenfeld, said to be intelligent but lazy. Later he became a career officer in the British and Israeli armies, and then was known, at least by my children and their friends, as Heinz the Spy, because he occupied a desk job with Intelligence first in the British Army, then in the *Haganah* (the pre-state Jewish defense force) and finally in the Israeli army.

Heinz Gruenfeld's brother Siegfried was known as an *Angeber*, Siggie the *Angeber*. An *Angeber* -- woe to the English language for failing to provide a suitable equivalent -- is a boaster. A number of English adjectives circumscribe the idea: pretentious, pompous, vain. An *Angeber pretends* to knowledge and achievement that he does not in fact possess. The French say *fanfaron* ("qui se vante de vertus... qu'il n'a pas").

In due time Siggie emigrated to England where he worked in a restaurant chain. To his dying days he claimed to have been a major in the British army. He had a variety of ex-wives and live-in mistresses, but he did not speak with his only son for over thirty years.

In 1995, many years after our early years in Germany, Siggie visited me in New York together with his then-partner. Both he and this lady were in their seventies by then.

By the time Siegfried came to New York, he was no longer Siegfried Gruenfeld at all. He was Oliver Cromwell -- Ollie to his lady friend. This is his story of how his change of name came about:

During the war, Siggie explained, he was a member of the British armed forces, in a confidential, actually a secret capacity. There always was the danger of being captured by the Germans, he was told by his superiors, so it is necessary that he hide his German Jewish origins by choosing an English name. (By the time he told me this, then an old man, Siggie/Ollie had not been able to rid his speech of a harsh Germanic accent). So, what could be more English than Cromwell? Oliver Cromwell! When I asked him why he did not revert to the name that his parents had given him, once the war was over, he explained, with only a slight bit of exasperation, that no, he was not at liberty to do so, under any circumstances, much as he would want to, would want to honor his father, like. His change of name was decreed by a secret Act of Parliament, which, much as he would like to, he could not now contravene. Is there a public record of this name change, I asked him. What do you think, now he became indignant, it was a secret

Act of Parliament. They don't fool around with state secrets, you know.

I introduced Siggie and his lady to my friend Daniel Bergman and his girlfriend.

I had met Danny in college when I tried my hand at table tennis. I myself could never master more than the bare, awkward rudiments of this game. But Daniel took up table tennis with a great deal of energy and developed enviable skills at it. Later, while he was a Ph.D. student at Princeton in economics, he could only barely complete his degree, his time taken up by ping pong so much of the time. And when he became a Research Associate at Southern New Jersey State University, charged with assisting in university fiscal planning, Danny could never muster much interest or energy for advancement. With all that, he wrote enough analytic reports to satisfy his employers. But he did keep up a tremendous enthusiasm for ping-pong, telling us that, in fact, he had achieved quite a high rating in international table tennis circles. A rating of 2000 in the international arena, he said, modestly, would not be so surprising for a jock type of person, but for an economist, well, I do take some pride.

Bergman had been known to exaggerate, so I did something I should not have done: I checked his claim on the Internet. I found that, indeed, Daniel Bergman had a rating of 1980 (not quite 2000)



in the world of table tennis, but his rating was USATT (U.S.A. Table Tennis), and not ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation). As it happens, it's roughly twice as difficult to get a particular score internationally as nationally. For instance, the Internet told me, the very high-ranked American player Ilija Lupulesku has a USATT rating of 2703 and an ITTF rating of 1373. So it was a matter of simple arithmetic to learn that my friend Bergman would be rated at less than 1000 in the ITTF scheme were he to compete in the international arena.

It's actually not something that I am proud of, my habit of checking on the claims of friends and acquaintances. But, at least, I never told Danny that I found him out. I did mention the salient facts to a mutual acquaintance, who lost no time in telling Danny, who, in turn, added my indiscretion to his list of grievances against me. But all that happened years later.

At the dinner at which I introduced my British visitors to Danny and his girlfriend at the time (a psychoanalytically trained psychotherapist), Siggie (now Ollie) casually mentioned a number of accomplishments in his life. His many years of service at the Red Pepper restaurant chain, for one. Every year at Christmas, the firm now sends him a food basket. And they don't skimp on it, not by a long shot: each of these baskets may be worth a couple

hundred quid. And that is not something the company does for just any retired employee.

When the conversation turned to wartime service, the talk in our living room would have a lasting effect on my friendship with Daniel Bergman.

My own Second World War service consisted of two years and three months in the United States Navy, during which I never left American soil. I began as Apprentice Seaman, went through strenuous but invigorating boot training, and was advanced to the rank of petty officer second class (the equivalent of an Army staff sergeant) before my honorable discharge in 1946. This period of service was essentially a happy one, and I take pleasure in recounting it. One of its benefits was a life-long appreciation of military rank in all branches of service. Daniel, who had had an exemption from military service, is a lifelong civilian. I don't think that he would know which is higher, a corporal or a colonel.

Well, Oliver Cromwell (né Siegfried Gruenfeld) remarked that he had been major in the British army. Not too high an officer, but a respectable rank for a German Jewish immigrant at the time, don't you think. Knowing something about my cousin Siggie and his background, and also knowing something about the culture of the British officer corps, it was obvious to me that the two could never have been reconciled. I bit my tongue.

Soon after the elderly British couple excused themselves, it had been a long day, the effects of jet lag had not yet been totally overcome, and they requested a taxi to take them from our Brooklyn house back to the low-cost hotel in Manhattan where they stayed.

There is no way, no possible way that Siggie could have been a major in Britain, I said after they left. Maybe he was a Sergeant Major, a non-commissioned, enlisted man's rank, and that gave him the idea of representing himself as a major; after all, the term major appears in that title as well. Siggie was known as an *Angeber*, an incurable braggart. My mother, of blessed memory, could have testified to that. But Daniel took violent offense. He, no relative of ours, felt called upon to defend Siggie and his stories against me, his own cousin. Why do you doubt what he said? Why tear down the achievements of others? You always attack and tear down, you always seek to besmirch. I tried to point out that I have had military experience, that I have a keen interest in military rank, that I have a background in Anthony Powell (Danny does not read fiction), and that Siggie did not have the background that would have allowed him to become a major in the British Army. But Danny could not control his fury. He took hold of his lady (who has had psychoanalytic training), left our house in a huff and, in

the decade that has passed since this event took place, has never again given me the pleasure of his company.

Another of my mother's sisters also had two sons: Werner and Gert Hardt. Werner became a student rabbi, married in the last year before the war, had a baby, and was then killed in the Holocaust, together with his wife and child. The younger Hardt boy, Gert, was sent to England alone when seventeen and was there adopted by a Quaker family. He became a Quaker himself and a teacher, and lived out a lonely life as a gay man in the closet. He was seventy-two when he died, of an unnamed disease.

While we still lived in Germany, all these Stettin cousins came to visit us in Berlin and I visited them and my grandmother in Stettin. Siegfried the *Angeber* was a leader in one of the many Jewish youth organizations. The one he chose was called *Der Ring*. It preached the manly virtues and loyalty to German values, despite everything, as he and his comrades would say. When I visited Stettin, Siegfried invited me to participate in a *Ring* activity. I became one of his subordinates in an hour of military drill. No, he explained to the group. This man there -- I was about eight -- yes, he is my cousin, but he gets no special privileges here.

Gert was much gentler. He took me on a boat trip around the Stettin harbor. We Jews have unattractive qualities, he told me on this trip. We are too loud. Guard against that. You don't want to

expose yourself and your fellow Jews to criticism. Forty years later, in the safety of England, Gert could not remember any such sentiments as a boy. But he did allow that Israel should be nicer to the Arabs.

Heinz, Siegfried's brother, the cousin fated to be in the Israeli army, befriended me early. I was but ten or thereabouts, and he was already in adult life, more or less. Some eight years older than I, he was known to be lazy. When he failed his *Abitur* (the rigorous final examination in Prussian high schools), this reputation became fixed, at least as far as my parents were concerned. My other cousin of about the same age as Siegfried, Werner Hardt, had passed on his first try, further contributing to Heinz's disgrace. But Heinz's parents sent him to live on his own in Berlin, in a furnished room not far from our apartment, where he set up bachelor's digs to engage in Jewish studies. It was in this apartment that Heinz would entertain me from time to time. This began a mutual sympathy that was to last for over sixty years, ending with Heinz's death in Jerusalem.

I was not to enjoy happy relations with my Quaker cousin Gert in later life. Gert became one of my two English cousins in due time (the other one being the man later known as Oliver Cromwell). He visited my mother and me in New York and also on the West Coast, but he had his own circle of male friends

wherever he traveled, and regarded our homes as little more than free hotels.

Gert was given to amateur photography, as I was, but he refused to take an interest in the technical aspects of that art. With all that he was quarrelsome on technical matters, assuming that untutored preconceptions could prevail over detailed attention to the intricacies of f-stops. In his own rather gentle way, he did resemble our mutual cousin Cromwell as a know-all. I suppose that was built into our generation of Jewish smart alecks, both in Europe and New York.

Once on the West Coast I was foolish enough to argue with his notion that the British mile is longer than the American. It was a stupid brawl, childish, the kind I remember from grade school. I should have let it go, obviously. He persisted and insisted, claiming to know that which, in his view, everyone knew except me, namely that the British mile, like the British gallon, is bigger than its American counterpart. Finally, rummaging through my reference works, I was able to show him that he was mistaken. I considered myself really lucky to find the answer so easily in an encyclopedia. But Gert gave no sign of regret or discomfort. He took a look at the book, said absolutely nothing, and then remarked on the weather.

Overall, with cousins, I was fortunate with some and less so with others.

My school life in Berlin began at the public school in *Bochumer Strasse*, two blocks from our apartment. I entered the lowest grade some months before the Nazi seizure of power, but of course life for Jews was already precarious (at least for those who were later shown to have been prescient.) In one of my very earliest memories, I was present when my parents negotiated with the (Jewish) landlord of our new apartment on *Bundesrat Ufer*. The landlord (who occupied an apartment next to ours in the same building) urged my parents to sign a very long lease -- ten years, twenty-five, whatever. And I remember my mother: in days like these, who knows what can happen? And then the landlord, in that voice of great calm and confidence that I have since heard so many times from people who reassure you about matters that should in fact evoke fear. Madam, if you like the apartment, if it serves your needs, why not commit yourself? There is no reason to hesitate.

But my mother's interview with the teacher who was to have me in his class for the next four years was genuinely confidence inspiring. I can assure you, madam, that as long as I am a teacher here, a Jewish child will not be treated differently from any other. And he was as good as his word, insofar as he was able to exercise control. I tried to look him up after the war and wrote to the

educational authority, asking how I could find my old teacher, *Herrn Westphal*. The answer came soon enough. *Doktor Westphal*, we regret to inform you, died some years ago. And since then I offer my advice, at some cost to the patience of my children: if you remember your teachers, thank them while you still can.

My class consisted of some forty boys, of whom three or four were Jews. (Girls went to this school in a separate building.) Perforce we Jewish boys became playmates since the others were told not to have anything to do with us. Of the three others, two became memorable and still live as I write. Kurt Blum, as I said, now lives in Florida. Wolfgang Goldschmidt lives in a suburb of Tel Aviv from where he engaged in international trade for many years. But it was Kurt who was my "best friend."

*Herr Blaustein*, teacher of Jewish religion, was a bane of Jewish life in this public school on *Bochumer Strasse*. In these early years of Nazi rule, the Prussian schools continued the religious instruction practices that it had inherited from previous regimes. Christian students would be taught once a week in the rudiments of the Christian religion, and Jewish students would leave the room to receive Jewish religious instruction in the same building, by a Jewish teacher appointed and paid for by the state.



At *Bochumer Strasse* this task for Jewish students fell to *Herr* Blaustein, an elderly Jewish gentleman. My elder sister had been taught by him before me and had been embittered by the experience. And indeed *Herr* Blaustein was a martinet, he was morose, he had no enthusiasm for Jewish learning. He taught us to sound out Hebrew letters, telling us that we must be able to do so rapidly. There was no attempt to teach us the Hebrew language; it was all a matter of learning to pronounce meaningless sounds. This approach to "learning Hebrew" was of course not unusual in Germany at the time, nor is it, I am sorry to say, unusual among American Jews today. But it taught me an early disrespect for Hebrew religious instruction. (A few years later, in the Berlin Jewish school that I attended, I was delighted to have actual Hebrew taught to me by teachers who had the background and enthusiasm to teach the modern language.)

*Herr* Blaustein (a pseudonym) was a man nobody liked, as far as I could determine. Not my sister, not my parents, and certainly not I. Like all teachers in that school at the time, he opened each class by giving the "German salute," as the practice was called at the time: he would raise his arm and mouth "Heil Hitler." But his arm was limp and his face troubled. Of course he suffered; of course we, children, were unjust to him.

During one of the years that I suffered under *Herr* Blaustein, he pursued a project of genealogy. He began by giving out a simple questionnaire for us to take home. He wanted the names of our parents, our grandparents, uncles, cousins, and so forth. My mother grumbled but complied. More and more questionnaires came in succeeding weeks: paternal grandparents one week, maternal ones the next. Then there were separate questionnaires for four sets of great-grandparents. Then various kinds of uncles and great uncles. There was no end. What was the reason or purpose behind Mr. Blaustein's insatiable curiosity? My mother thought that it was the Nazi government that was behind it, gathering data for its preoccupation with "Aryan" purity, and, of course, we must do what they say. Moreover, *Herr* Blaustein, though Jewish, was a *Beamter*, a government-appointed teacher and therefore a government official. In short, we must do what he says.

We never did discover what it was that *Herr* Blaustein was up to or what was behind his genealogical furies. Nor did we find out what happened to him. I have little doubt that he perished at Auschwitz or at one of the other death camps.

The "best student" in the class, officially, was a Christian boy called Hans Brück. His family was upper class in some way, apparently eager to maintain the substance, or at least the forms of

decency in days that saw a very rapid Nazification of social relations. Obviously Hans could not play with us Jews or talk with us in school. But once day my friend Kurt was invited to Hans's birthday party. We, the uninvited Jews, did not think kindly of Kurt when he accepted this invitation. But there were no subsequent social contacts between Hans and Kurt, or between Hans and any of the rest of us. And I forget how I heard that Hans "fell" in the war, or even whether this is true.

I did meet one of the other Christian boys from my class after the war. It was in 1946 or 1947, and I had just been discharged from the U.S. Navy, and had by then become an American in habits, outlook, and speech. I had left Germany eight years earlier, and had been away from the public school on *Bochumer* for about ten. But Walter Baumann and I, when we met in a cafeteria in Times Square, had no difficulty in recognizing one another.

Some twenty years later, the movie *Midnight Cowboy* would recreate the atmosphere of Times Square late at night in those days. When I met Baumann there it was already sleazy and lonely. What were the two of us doing in Times Square at that time of night? I do not recall. In any case, my meeting with Baumann was moving for us both. We were able to talk freely, across the "racial" divide, as we never could have in Nazi Germany where we had last been together.

Baumann told me that, unbeknownst to anyone in our class, he was not as purely "Aryan" as everyone had assumed him to be. One of his parents was Jewish, so he was a *Mischling*, of the first grade, a mixed-blood, and had suffered as a result. And then he emigrated to America after the war, had fallen in with a group of homosexual friends, where, he said, he now found great happiness. Neither of us felt the need to make a note of the other's address, and I never saw him again, or any other of the Christian boys with whom I had spent four of my very early years.

Of course I had a great curiosity about how these years would have been seen by Baumann, how, for instance, he saw his Jewish classmates. But our encounter in Times Square did not dwell on any of this. All I remember is his grating German accent and his strange tales of the group he was now "hanging around with." The "r" in "around" was Germanic, and that is what now stands out in my memories of the incident.

*Herr Westphal* ran a tight ship in that class in the public school on *Bochumer Strasse*. When something displeased him about one of us, he summoned the culprit to the front, took out his flexible little whip, and administered four or five rapid, stinging strokes. We had to put our head between his knees, and he would strike. Now, after all these years, I am still surprised that the barbarity of the thing never struck my good old teacher Westphal.

*Herr* Westphal also was big on homework and tests and dictations. He would read a text and we were to write what he read. One, two, or even three errors were acceptable, but four were not. Four errors, that was failure.

At the time in question -- 1934? -- a shiny new truck had begun to appear on *Bundesrat Ufer* every afternoon to sell chocolates. It was a child-oriented merchandising enterprise the likes of which I have never seen before or after. It gave me a sense of well being, of things improving in this world, much like the technical and merchandising improvements of our day -- Starbucks, the Internet -- that seem to make life more comfortable or at least more modern.

On one particular balmy spring afternoon I returned from school and my mother suggested I go to the chocolate truck to make a purchase. The weather, the new truck, the turning of the season, all these seem to have stimulated in her an elevated mood, in the midst of the general depression of our social life that had followed the Nazi seizure of power.

Then I remembered that *Herr* Westphal had returned a dictation paper to us that day, and that mine had been found to have four errors. I did hesitate for just an instant, but then I felt duty bound to tell my mother. Her face sank. Hitler had just achieved another one of his victories over the comfortable life that

had been ours before he came. No, in that case, she said, sadly shaking her head, no, four errors, no, we better not buy any chocolates.

My life as a school child took a turn for the better when I entered Jewish schools. It seems that Jewish children, after about 1936, were no longer permitted to attend public institutions. This turned out to be a great boon to us, as it would have been to the non-Jewish children had they had the same opportunity.

These Jewish institutions -- and I attended two in turn -- had an entirely different atmosphere. The teachers were devoted and humane, the children friendly and interesting to one another; all this was in dramatic contrast to the public school. With all the good will and didactic skill of *Herr* Westphal, that establishment could not escape its harsh Prussian origins, now further hardened by the new Nazi rulers.

The Jewish school in *Wilsnacker Strasse*, the last school I attended before my family's emigration, was for me a venue of intellectual awakening. But it was more than that. It was infused with a spirit of progressive education before that movement had become frozen and hackneyed. The teachers had all been trained in traditional German academia, but their attitudes, without exception, came from the liberal progressivism of the Weimar era. Most of them, and most of their pupils, were fated for death, but

that was not known in any way at the time of my studies there. My Christian classmates from *Bochumer Strasse*, whom I never encountered in Berlin again, were also slated for death in the coming war -- many of them -- whether or not they were to wear the skull insignia of the SS elite. But in contrast to us, these Christian boys never experienced the benefits of a humanistic education.

Our class at *Wilsnacker* was coeducational, and this itself introduced to us pre-adolescents a foretaste of sexual stimulation. I have retained an interest in the boys and girls I met during those two years at *Wilsnacker*, and have even had some contact with some of them over the years.

There were the Haberstein brothers, Peter, my age and in my class, and his older brother Max, a year ahead of us. These two boys were orphans and were brought up by their grandparents in the *Tiergarten* district of Berlin. I would visit them often and we would take the opportunity of playing informal soccer in the park. Peter's interests and mine were close: soccer, sports in general, and a precocious taste for literature. Peter introduced me to *Quo Vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz. When one of our classes lagged a bit, Peter would whisper comments to me in Latin that he had gleaned from this book. It meant more to him than to me.

Peter and Max Haberstein emigrated to America a year after I did. We rarely saw one another in the New World. Both died at early ages, of diseases I had never heard of. But in Berlin, while at *Wilsnacker*, Peter was my "best friend."

It was not unusual in that school for boys of ten and twelve to take an interest in politics. Politics of course meant Jewish politics. Is it right to be a Zionist? If so, we could join one of the Zionist youth groups. Or should we, despite all, remain German in spirit and aspiration? There was a non-Zionist youth group as well for those so minded. This was the *Ring*, which boasted my Stettin cousin Siegfried as one of its members. Each one of these groups called itself a *Bund* and partook of the youth culture that was introduced to Germany some forty years before by a remarkable social movement, the *Wandervögel*.

This movement had various offspring, differing very radically among themselves. But in all the movements that the *Wandervögel* influenced, there was criticism of "bourgeois" values and conventions. In the German youth movements of the early twentieth century there was often also an interest in the arts and in a life of the intellect; and beyond that, there was an appreciation of manual labor. The kibbutz movement in Israel was very much influenced by this tradition.



In Berlin, the Jewish *Bünde* taught simplicity of life style, and a concentration on what were thought to be the higher things in life. The girls were told not to wear lipstick. One of the implicit teachings, at least as it came through to me, was contempt for worldly success and contempt for opportunists and careerists. It is these attitudes that impressed me, even though, obviously, not everyone who went through such movements accepted them.

I myself never joined any of these groups, perhaps because I was too young. I think that I would have greatly enjoyed being in a *Bund*. It very much suited my frame of mind, insofar as I can reconstruct it now. But on the other hand I was perhaps too individualistic even then, given to solitary rumination, which would have made me an undesirable in a *Bund*. My older sister Annemarie, however, became a member of the *Bund* called *Werkleute*, whose members, those that reached Palestine, joined Hashomer Hatzair there in due time. Her group in Berlin consisted of girls only, as I recall. They had "evenings" in members' homes, and when in our apartment I could do no more than lurk in adjoining rooms.

As soon as we arrived in America, my sister lost all interest in her past as a *Bund* girl. She began to wear lipstick, was interested in boys, and married at a very young age to someone in the business world.

While I was never a member of a *Bund*, I was much affected by the values and attitudes, which were common coin of German Jewish children in those years. This was particularly true of the Jewish schools. The teacher in charge of my class, Dr. Felix Ferdinand Rosenberg, a Jewish academic from Bavaria who taught us German with a Bavarian accent, was a veteran of the German youth movement and did his best to instill its world outlook to us.

Once he gave us the assignment to walk streets in Berlin and to report on what we saw. I chose *Wilhelm Strasse*, in the government quarter of central Berlin, the seat of the German Foreign Ministry. Less than two years later no Jew could walk in any street of Berlin, let alone in the very heart of the government area. But we had no idea that we were on the eve of the Holocaust.

I was ten or eleven. I walked *Wilhelm Strasse* from one end to the other, noting various architectural features, monuments, whatnot. I wrote up my observations in fairly clean German prose, having often been praised for skill in composition by Dr. Rosenberg and my parents.

But this time Dr. Rosenberg was scathing. Here you write about *Wilhelm Strasse* as if it were just stone and brick? For heavens sake, don't you understand that *Wilhelm Strasse* is a concept, an idea ... it represents something beyond (a sneer here) the physical. I did not then know about Stanislavski, or about the

young student who was told to turn on the light. The aspiring actor flipped the switch, but was reprimanded, severely, for missing the whole point. Philistine, he was told, the real light is not there in the electric bulb; the inner light, that is what we are talking about. Dr. Rosenberg was an adept of the Stanislavski method.

Immediately after the war, in New York, I did some research on the German youth movement, its implications for the rise of the Nazis, its erotic component, and so forth. I had not heard from Dr. Rosenberg after I left Germany, but I thought that he, having been a participant, could throw some needed light. I placed an advertisement in the New York-based *Aufbau*, a weekly newspaper read by emigrant German Jews throughout the world, asking Dr. Felix Ferdinand Rosenberg, late of Berlin, to be in touch with me.

The first letter that I received was from Mexico City. It told me that the writer, Hans Rosen, is very well acquainted with Doktor Ruttenberg, but that the Doktor now lives in the hills, not too far from Mexico City, but far enough to require a strenuous day's bus journey by bus to get there. There are no telephone lines where the Doktor lives. Since he, Hans Rosen, is a good and intimate friend of the Doktor's, he would be honored to undertake this trip to help the Doktor get in touch with me. Trouble is, he, Hans Rosen, has recently broken a leg and has therefore been unable to work, so he has insufficient money to pay for the bus.

But if I were to send just \$50 in American money, he would gladly pay the rest and make the trip forthwith.

Well, no, I was in no hurry to send money to Mexico. But a few days later I did hear from Dr. Rosenberg, who was now in London where he had found a teaching position. Well, he wrote, what a pleasant surprise to hear from a former pupil. How are you, what are you doing, etc. And what is the occasion for your most welcome search for me?

The occasion was my research into the German Youth movement in that, my senior year in college. Those were days of heavy psychoanalytic interests for people in the social sciences, and I inquired whether he had an opinion on how, if at all, homosexuality played a role in these movements. In the Hitler Youth, also affected by the Youth Movement, there had been scandals of this kind, and, moreover, the literature on the Youth Movement discussed the matter to some extent. All these things I wrote to my revered teacher.

He never replied, and I never heard from him again, directly or indirectly. It was not the last time in my life that a wrong word, an awkward phrasing, an inconsiderate expression cost me a friendship. Do I regret these ruptures? I am not sure, not really.

Eva Kugelhoff entered our class at *Wilsnacker* a year or so after the rest of us. Her family had just settled in Berlin from

Königsberg, an old German city in East Prussia. (Largely destroyed during the war, this city, under the name of Kaliningrad, is today a curious Russian enclave wedged between Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland.) She was a striking apparition, tall, mysterious, and beautiful to my twelve-year old eyes. I did not think that anyone else could be as sophisticated as she.

Some fifty years later I was teaching in the West. Among my students were a small number of youngsters who had developed a taste for ultra leftism, Maoism in particular. One of these, with whom I had crossed some semi-friendly swords on these matters, phoned me one day to tell me that an old aunt of his, Auntie Eve, Mrs. Eve O'Brien, claims to have known me in Berlin and wants to see me.

It was indeed my school mate Eva Kugelhoff, husband Bill in tow, who came to see us soon thereafter for coffee. But it developed that she had not been Kugelhoff since she left Berlin in 1939. Her family settled in Montreal. Their name was, well, became Kay. Also, well, they became Catholic. Her father told her that that it makes no sense to suffer as Jews. Why should one? But of course, in Germany they had been Jews, and there had been such wonderful folks in that old school on *Wilsnacker*, right? Her husband Bill looked at me, smiled, and assured me that his Eve is the same now as before, Jewish, Catholic, whatever.

Now when her father had the family baptized, how did it feel, I mean was the water hot, cold, lukewarm? I had always wondered about such things, and I asked her now about the temperature of the baptismal waters. An embarrassment ensued. But Eva, Eve at the time, assured my wife that I had been just like that in Berlin too. I was astounded and pleased that I had apparently impressed her, some fifty years earlier, as she had impressed me. But no, we never saw either "Eve" or Bill after that.

Other members of the class at *Wilsnacker* also turn up, but no more often than, say, once in twenty years. My old friend Wolfgang Goldsmith, now Ze'ev Zahavi, is retired in Tel Aviv. He dropped in on me in Brooklyn, on one of his last business trips. He remembers names from *Wilsnacker* that I never knew. He also remembers everyone's birthday. But he has forgotten the politics of our class. He does not remember that while I had been on the side of the Zionists, he had been against. Now he is more Zionist than I, he says. But how Zionist can you be when you can't even remember what you were at age eleven?

Kurt Blum, my best friend in my earliest school days, never went to *Wilsnacker*. His parents sent him to a different Jewish school, further west in the city, more expensive. We were not best friends in those later years -- best friends go to the same school. I had not realized the extent to which we had lost track until he told

me on the phone, sixty-five years later, that he had remained in Berlin two years longer than I, that he had been there at the beginning of the Holocaust, that he had to wear the Star of David in the street, and that there had been no day on which he had not been beaten in the street. He escaped and survived, but he had been closer to the abyss than I.

When I think about these days of Berlin, with pre-adolescence at *Wilsnacker* and other events that occurred then, it is actually the earlier years of childhood, with Kurt Blum as my best friend, that most demand my contemplations.

## Max Shachtman

Max Shachtman was not present at the beginnings of my political life. But he did arrive there, some years later.

Late in 1938, or perhaps some time in 1939, I saw my first Communist. An adult woman, but younger than my mother, was handing something out at Grand Central Station, on Forty-Second Street, corner of Vanderbilt Avenue. To me she seemed hurried and furtive, but hard, a Communist. No doubt she handed out "leaflets," a concept I had no way of knowing about at the time, "leaflets" concerning an issue that I had no way of understanding. (And now that I recall the incident it is 2005. I have not seen anyone handing out "leaflets" for many years. The institution seems to have vanished, at least for the time being.)

I had arrived in America some months before. I was in sixth grade at Public School 166, Manhattan.

Communism in Berlin was something I heard about but never saw. Once I was told that Communists had marched in a disorderly demonstration on *Strom Strasse*, within view of our apartment on *Bundesrat Ufer*. Or perhaps I had had a glimpse myself. Obviously this must have been before my seventh birthday in March of 1933. I was a Communist then, as I indicated to my teacher who wanted a show of hands of how many National Socialists, Social Democrats, Communists, etc., there were in his class.



In the Nazi years that followed, I would sometimes, quite often actually, fiddle with the family's expensive radio set until, through much crackling, I heard the manly, defiant, Communist voice of a fearless comrade many miles away: *Achtung Achtung Hier Ist Moskau*. And then the most exciting thing of all: the playing of the International. To this day, I cannot hear these notes without a feeling of great exhilaration. I was in no way surprised when I later heard that the Nazis would shoot people for whistling this anthem. The tune was the most revolutionary thing imaginable. Today of course it is freely available on the Internet and can be heard without danger or *frisson* of any kind. Computing has changed many things, but nothing more profound than robbing the International of its magic.

The last days of the Weimar republic were marked by a colorful, multi-party pageantry of politics. There were badges, flags, processions, fighting songs -- a giant, permanent pep rally. Party symbols seemed to demarcate all public discourse: the three arrows of the Social Democrats, the hammer and sickle of the Communists, the ominous swastika of the National Socialists. After January of 1933, of course, only the Nazi presence remained in the public eye, but Nazi pageantry, most especially its songs, had a powerful fascination for me. It has remained with me until this day, in some ways. But here again the Internet has seen to it that its perverse attractiveness has been reduced. Any of these Nazi songs, with lyrics that not only threaten death to Jews but also a new world of Youth !

Youth !, can now be called up from Google, not only to stimulate nostalgia but also thus to reveal their cheap tawdriness.

Curiosity about politics also directed me to other channels in those early years of the Nazi regime.

Alone, I would visit Friday evening services at the *Levetzow Strasse* synagogue, where a sweet thimble of wine was served at the conclusion of the service. But wine is not where my interest lay. I concerned myself with the various organizations -- Jewish youth groups, Jewish civil organizations -- that competed in the vibrant Jewish community of those years, and whose echoes could be heard in the synagogue. I wrote a letter to the young rabbi. Wouldn't it be a good idea, and solve so many problems, if the different organizations were to simply unite ? The rabbi received me politely and explained, well, what could he have said ? He did take me seriously, as the young Jewish citizen-to-be that I was.

But with all that, I was mainly Communist, for the rest of my Berlin days, and also when I arrived in New York, aged twelve.

My sister Hilde would sometimes see Isolde, a friend from Berlin, at our New York refugee apartment. Like my sister, Isolde was five older than I, but Isolde flattered me by talking about politics with me. One day she looked at my collection of dime pamphlet, most of which I had bought at the Workers Bookshop on East Twelfth Street. One of them had a picture of Stalin on its cover. Isolde looked at the pamphlet and then at me.

"Isn't he wonderful, Stalin," she said. I was taken aback. Could it be that someone so mature would be such a crude groupie for the Russian dictator? My sister quarreled with Isolde, but not about politics, which held no interest to my sister. We never saw Isolde again.

I would look at the *Daily Worker* as often as I could, even though its ponderous articles were as tedious to me then as they would be now. It was Communist life, not Communist thought that interested me. The *DW* had a column that held my very special interest, *What's On*. In that period of intense Communist activity in New York, not a day would go by without an event sponsored by the Party itself or by one of its innumerable front organizations. But I needed to be concerned about the cost of admission. Many of these events were free, but some would charge as much as fifty cents or a Dollar, money that I did not have.

There was a particular event in Manhattan Center that I very much wanted to attend because it featured Earl Browder in person as well as a number of luminaries "on the cultural front," writers and entertainers who were fellow travelers. The price of admission was not shown in the announcement, so I took the IRT subway to 34th Street, hoping that I would be able to afford it.

One of the great joys of attending large Communist events in those days was the preview of the audience in the subway coming, and the postview of the people on the subway leaving. The Communist sub-culture, like no other, was given to wearing outsized political buttons.

Stalin being allied with Hitler for the moment, American Communists wore the paraphernalia of "peace," the buttons and badges of the American Peace Mobilization. (After the German invasion of Russia on June 22 of 1941, APM obviously became pro-war. It changed its name then to American Peoples Mobilization -- still APM, of course, still steadfast in its course.)

On the way to 34th Street I got into a conversation with one of these button wearers. He was a man perhaps in his thirties -- at any rate an adult -- what did I know about the looks of age then? He was dressed in business clothes, a perfectly respectable, American man, in no way a wild-eyed Communist, certainly not a refugee from Nazi Germany like me. I mentioned to him that, like him, I hoped to go to the Manhattan Center meeting but might not be able to afford the admission. The man reached into his pocket and gave me a dollar. Then he marched away quickly, stopping only long enough to explain that I should be on my own going to the Center. (Only now, recalling this incident sixty-five years later, does it occur to me that my behavior could have been interpreted as begging.)

In all the years that have passed, I thought of this man as "the Good Stalinist." A good man, selflessly giving, sensitive to my embarrassment. But even as I know that I have wrongfully condemned people in my mind on insufficient information, I now suspect that "the Good Stalinist" may have benefited from an equally exaggerated judgment in my private case law of good and bad.

During the election campaign of 1940, I went to Wendell Willkie's big rally in Madison Square Garden, Eighth Avenue on 50th Street. I was a solitary boy of fourteen. A curious gentleman, or perhaps lady, looked at me and said, "but I thought that the Jews support Roosevelt."

The pageantry of the Willkie meeting was great fun, but the major parties could not truly satisfy my need for political excitement. So I often went to that same Madison Square Garden for rallies staged by the Communists. Their leader at the time, Earl Browder, was a dry and dogmatic speaker with a vindictive rhetoric. But the crowd of thousands would break out singing, to the tune of that old Protestant hymn that I had never heard with its original words:

Browder is our Leader,  
We shall not be moved.  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,  
We shall not be moved

Perfectly adult, college-educated people, most of them Jewish, were singing this by the thousands. A friend of mine from my junior high school, who lacked my fascination with fringe movements but who accompanied me out of sheer companionability, had the appropriate response that eluded me: he giggled at the preposterous refrain. Today it is hard to imagine that such enormous Communist, Stalinist events ever took

place on American soil. With the coming of the New Left, and all the other lefts in the last sixty years, there no longer are Leaders that can be worshipped in just that way, no more trees that stand so still by the waters.

I also attended the very large meeting of the America First Committee at Madison Square Garden in May of 1941, addressed both by the right-wing Charles Lindbergh and the Socialist Norman Thomas. Both opposed FDR's help to Britain in the early years of the war. The Communists had the same line, but, the Stalin-Hitler pact still in effect, Communists were shunned by Socialists and mainstream groups alike, and therefore could not be part of America First.

I was in an overflow crowd at the AF meeting, in one of the side streets just outside the Garden. My new friend Pete Fields was there, and he introduced me to his new comrades in the Young Peoples Socialist League (2nd International), which he had just joined after switching from the Young Peoples Socialist League (4th International). "Pete Fields" was a "party name," a pseudonym. People in the Communist and Trotskyist movements assumed such names for reasons, they said, of conspiracy, to hide from the police and other such "reactionaries." Almost all the "party names" were non-Jewish, despite the fact that their owners were generally Jewish.

It was a heady evening for me, not least because some of the YPSL girls paid a certain kind of attention to me, which I had not experienced before. I was fifteen that year, the youngest person around. I

began to see the excitement of being young in the vibrant Left Wing of the time.

Earlier, in 1939, I had turned thirteen. I had no bar mitzvah then, but I did come of age during that year: Hitler and Stalin having just signed a pact, my political views matured.

On the day my father committed suicide, February 11 of 1940, I received a packet of materials that I had requested from the Independent Labor League of America, led by Jay Lovestone. I was almost fourteen then. This group, the ILL, was communist but anti-Stalinist. It dissolved itself a few months later, but it was not the only group of its kind with whom I tried to establish contact. The best of all these, or the one with the best name at any rate, was the Revolutionary Workers League. What could be more daring than to call oneself revolutionary? For its time, and to my fourteen-year old mind in any case, revolutionary was about as outrageous as it gets.

I was quite attracted to the RWL and similar groups. I would haunt their meetings and their meeting halls. Sometimes I would go in the evening to one of these places without knowing for sure whether anyone would be there. Usually there was something going on, but sometimes there was not. The place could be locked; my expectations -- entertainment, excitement, social contact with fascinating people -- all disappointed.

By the time I learned about it, the Revolutionary Workers League had split into two factions, one led by a Comrade Tom Stamm, the other by

a Comrade Hugo Oehler. As I understood it, the differences had to do with whether Chicago or New York would be more suitable as headquarters for the party of the American proletariat. I believe that the New York group adhered to Oehler. The headquarters were located on East 14th Street, a stone's throw from the corner where Emma Goldman had briefly been a streetwalker to raise money for the revolution. Each time I tried to visit the RWL headquarters, the doors were locked. The hallway was dark and ill kept. It certainly gave the appearance of revolution, sedition, conspiracy. That was too much even for me. I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to incur the risks of this kind of association.

The Socialist Labor Party was a totally different kind of enterprise. A very church-like atmosphere pervaded the "public lectures" that were held, bi-weekly I believe, at a hotel on Eighth Avenue and 50th or 51st Street. Comrades like Aaron Orange, a New York City high school teacher, or Comrade Ed Teichert, who was described as a "steel worker," would drone on and on, referring to intricate organization charts that showed how the future socialist America would be governed. Orange also offered a small class on Marxism in an office building in Times Square, which I attended when I was thirteen. The "lectures" at the hotel always ended with the singing of the International, with words that were unique to the SLP.

These left-wing groups were not the only ones that attracted my interests. I was in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses as well. In those days



they were very radical. "Religion is a snare and a racket," they proclaimed. Obviously, they did not include themselves in "religion." Today they no longer use such language, but at the time they were like me in temperament, I thought, if not in opinion.

Other groups that attracted my interest were plainly anti-Semitic, so of course they were my enemies as I was theirs. In Yorkville I encountered a group of Hitler Youth in uniform, whom I heckled. They threatened me with bodily harm, but I felt safe; I was no longer in Berlin. Within a few months these groups, part of the German American Bund, vanished from the streets with the coming of the war.

The Christian Front, lead by Father Charles Coughlin of Michigan, was also thought to be anti-Semitic, an interpretation I accepted, although I saw little of that in the copies of *Social Justice* that I glanced at from time to time. The great thing about the Christian Front was that it held street demonstrations at a time and place that were very convenient for me, on Sunday afternoons on Broadway near 55th Street, an hour or so after the SLP "lecture" ended just a couple of blocks away. What a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon ! CF's demonstrations were held against radio station WMCA (who advertised that it was "on the top of your dial") apparently because the station had banned Father Coughlin's weekly radio speeches. "WMCA, at the bottom of the pile," the demonstrators thought it was. They had no objections to my gawking at them.

My contacts with Hashomer Hatzair in those months were more weighty and resulted in my life-long sympathy with that movement.

On the west side of Broadway, just north of 96th Street, where the Riverside and Riviera movie theaters stood side by side, I first saw Zvi, dressed in the blue shirt of the Zionist youth, shaking a collection box of the Jewish National Fund, asking the public to contribute to the Jewish national effort in the then-Palestine. In the months ahead, I would encounter Zvi, not only in the venues of his own movement, but also at other left-wing meetings and lectures throughout the city.

Zvi, Hebrew for deer, was not what his parents had named him. They might have called him Seymour. But Zvi, like all his comrades (*chaverim*), assumed a Hebrew movement name, partly as a token of liberation from parental, assimilationist norms. These pseudonyms in Hashomer Hatzair and other Zionist youth groups were in some respects the very opposite of the Trotskyist party names. They proclaimed Jewishness where party names tried to hide it. And they affected only first names, not family names.

I had been familiar with Zionist youth groups in Germany. It had been my impression that one would find deep and profound friendships in such groups. I had lost all my good friends when I left Germany and I was quite hungry for social attachments of the kind I had had in my good Jewish school in Berlin.

That, as much as my fascination with political life, was in my mind as I met Zvi. He told me that he was a member of a youth organization called Hashomer Hatzair, Young Guardian, that was, as he explained, both Zionist and revolutionary socialist. It was also obviously a *Bund*, that very special kind of youth group to which my sister had belonged in Germany. Would it be the vehicle through which I could escape the foreigner's loneliness in the new country?

Zvi said that Hashomer Hatzair was Zionist, that is to say nationalist, because, he said, nationalism is the natural state of a revolutionary. When Lenin sojourned in Switzerland, why didn't he stay there and work as a Swiss Communist? (The format of the argument -- the polemical question -- was one with which I became very familiar in the years to come as a New York radical). Staying in Switzerland could have saved Lenin much trouble. But no, he couldn't do that because he was a Russian, and as a Russian he had to go back to where he belonged, Russia, to make the revolution there. Every revolutionary must work in the nation to which he belongs. You and I, Jews, belong to the Jewish nation, which is in the process of rebirth in Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, also known as Palestine.

To the kind of people with whom I associated at the time, including my new friend Phil Young, an appeal to Lenin was decisive. Lenin was the measure of everything revolutionary. Moreover, there could be no doubt that Zvi was speaking the truth when he said that I, either then

at age fourteen or later at any age, could hardly be a member of the American proletariat. Hashomer Hatzair's insistence that people like me were Jews stood in contrast to the fiction of all the Communists, Lovestonites, Trotskyists, Norman-Thomas Socialists, etc., that we were exploited American working men.

But Hashomer Hatzair had its own *langue de bois*, its private language of bombastic formulas. In addition to looking to Marx (and, at that time, to Lenin and Trotsky) for sacred scripture, it also propounded the doctrines of Ber Borochov, a socialist and Zionist writer who had died in 1917. Borochov's teachings were approximately as follows: The Jewish people suffer from abnormal economic conditions in all the countries of the diaspora. Basically, they are neither workers nor capitalists, and therefore have no secure place anywhere. However, this state of economic distress has a built-in solution: there is a *stychic* process that will lead the Jews of the world, gradually, to immigrate to their own country, Palestine, where they will forge a socialist society and more or less live happily ever after.

I did not know the meaning of *stychic*, but there were many words that I did not know. I had arrived from Germany two years prior to this period, and while my English showed no foreign accent, my vocabulary was imperfect. I was deficient in the language of formal expository writings, partly because I was, although I did not know it, still a child; and partly because I was, something I wished to deny as well, a foreigner. In

order to read the political tracts that my new companions expected me to absorb, I habitually referred to a dictionary.

But *stychic* was in none of these works of reference. Nor have I found the word since then in any such work.

Nevertheless, it seems that *langue de bois*, the dead, wooden formulas of Marxist talk and Marxist thinking, did not unduly deter me from finding my way to sympathizing with Trotskyism.

The principal warnings against this commitment came from a number of brainy young people, mostly associated with Norman Thomas's Socialist Party, whom I met casually at meetings of various kinds.

Walking one evening on Broadway near 116th Street, in the Columbia University neighborhood, I happened upon a street meeting of the Young Peoples Socialist League - Second International, i.e. the youth group of the Socialist Party. A graduate-student type of young man, upon hearing for my growing sympathies for the Trotskyists, explained it this way: The Trotskyites, yes, I know, the Cannonites and the Shachtmanites. (Opponents of Trotskyists used the term Trotskyites). But look. On the one hand they perpetually quarrel among themselves, on the other they have no way of living together with differences of opinion. Whenever there are disagreements they split into still more little grouplets. It shows that these Bolsheviks have no democratic internal life. How can we trust them to work for a democratic society? This proved to be a trenchant criticism, and it came to me early. I listened, was impressed with it, but ultimately it

did not deter me from a commitment to the revolutionary life of American Trotskyism.

At this time, in early 1940 or thereabouts, the Trotskyists had indeed split. The Cannonites, faithful to Trotsky, the Old Man, insisted on their "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union." Despite the Soviet Union's war against Finland, despite Stalin's pact with Hitler, Trotsky insisted that the nationalized economy of the Soviet Union made it a "workers state," which, although "degenerated," merited "unconditional defense" by the international proletariat. In America, it was James Cannon who upheld this view against Max Shachtman.

Shachtman saw nothing but evil in Stalin and led a relentless campaign against the Russian dictator and all those who followed him. Especially the latter. Especially Stalinism in New York. To Shachtman and his followers, and in time I was one of them, New York Stalinists represented what was wrong with the world. Neither "capitalism" nor the other bogey words of the Left could arouse us to the same extent. It wasn't close.

My introduction to the world of Max Shachtman occurred as follows.

Early Sunday morning, June 22, 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. To everyone on the non-Communist Left, the importance of this event lay in the pleasure of watching the Stalinists squirm into new political positions. No more American Peace Mobilization, on to American

Peoples Mobilization. No more "imperialist" war in the Daily Worker. No more war mongering by FDR. I felt that, now aged fifteen, it was time to get more personally involved. I called my friend Phil Young and told him that I was ready to join the Young Peoples Socialist League, Fourth International, the youth section of Max Shachtman's Workers Party.

Phil took me to the national headquarters of the Party, located on the second floor of the loft building at 114 West 14th Street. Around the corner on Sixth Avenue was a cafeteria serving, among other delectations, pimento cheese on kaiser roll, my absolute favorite for many years. Where can you get pimento cheese now ? *Où sont les neiges d'antan ?* But the art deco temple of the Salvation Army still stands, a few doors west of 114.

Phil took me to the little cubbyhole that was the national headquarters of the Young Peoples Socialist League, Fourth International, and there introduced me to Irving Howe, the leader of this movement. Howe later became well known as an "intellectual" and, in that capacity, took "Howe" as his legal name. When I knew him, "Howe" was only his "party name." He discarded the funny-sounding Jewish name of his fathers in later life completely, even as he had scorned it in his earlier days as a revolutionary.

Howe was happy enough to admit me to the YPSL, wondering whether I had any questions. Well, shouldn't I read the constitution of the organization that I am joining. No, no, Howe explained, what matters is the politics of our group, not a constitution. Fine. But then Howe went on

to point out that it is "customary" to take on a "party name," or perhaps he said a "league name," and asked me to choose one. I was determined not to commit the error of judgment of my new comrades who sought to hide their Jewishness in the choice of party names. Moreover, I wanted a name that existed in both German and English. For the first name I chose my uncle's name (who, unbeknown to me then, was about to be killed in the Holocaust), Arthur. Something else that could be Jewish or not, German or American, as last name. Stein. I became Arthur Stein in the movement.

In the seven subsequent years that I spent in this movement, first in the YPSL and upon the dissolution of this "league" in the Workers Party, I was never appointed or elected to any committee, was never given any office of responsibility, was never a leader in any sense, formal or informal. This became a pattern in my future life, academic and otherwise: I was not a committee person, not a leader. I credit this achievement to my early life in the radical movement. While I was serious enough about the political and ideological claims of the group to which I belonged, I simply could not conform to the hierarchies of leadership to become a reliable organization man.

Gaining a place in the hierarchy was the hidden but nevertheless principal aim of most if not all the radicals I met. I myself felt the pressures of this vanity. Of course I would have loved to be on committees, to be a leader. Many years later I read a history of the Protestant community in the Nazi concentration camp of Theresienstadt. These



"racially" Jewish but religiously Christian inmates, under the very heels of the SS, engaged in numerous struggles for leadership within their prayer group. The drive toward self-assertion, worse, self-importance, often hidden and repressed, seems extraordinarily strong among humans, perhaps especially human males. I was in no way exempt from this affliction, but some quirks of my personality doomed any such strivings from the start.

To appreciate the particular meaning of the struggle for hierarchy in the Trotskyist movement it helps to see it in the context of the more general Marxist cult of personality.

In the world of Leninist Marxism especially (Trotskyism and Stalinism), there was a curious split between what was professed and what was practiced concerning the nature of leadership. Formal Marxist doctrines teach the importance of impersonal, objective, "material" forces, as well as the equality of all men. But Marxist practice, from the days of Karl Marx himself, has promoted an unrelenting worship of elect individuals, elect teachers and leaders. As Christianity is named after a man, Jesus Christ, so Marxism, as the movement is proud to name itself, looks to an elect leader and teacher, Karl Marx. Lenin, even in his lifetime, was considered as endowed by an aura of greatness. In turn, Trotsky, the "Old Man" to his followers, partook of the aura.

It is this aura for which people in the American Trotskyist movement have competed since Trotsky's death in 1940. In the history of Trotskyism there have been many splits but few fusions, despite the fact

that all the groups and grouplets profess the same set of principles. The reason is the struggle for aura; when a split occurs, there is the opportunity for yet another aura-endowed leader to emerge. After the split of 1940, when Shachtman lead a group of followers to form his own organization, there arose Shachtmanism, with Max Shachtman as one of the anointed of world history. Few of the Trotskyist groups, then or now, have changed leaders without a split. Shachtman could not be voted out of his leadership position any more than Jesus Christ could be replaced by a different messiah in the Christian church.

To be a Shachtman was not quite the same as being Karl Marx in person. But almost. And since Karl Marx was seen as of transcending importance in the history of the world, to be something like him -- even somewhat remotely like him -- was not a small matter. In the minds of people like me at the time, much, very much, was at stake in what in retrospect were shabby bickerings over power and esteem in tiny little grouplets.

The top leader was unassailable, but auxiliary leaders were open to a certain amount of rotation. Irving Howe has related in his memoirs, without a trace of self-consciousness, how he had struggled for ascendancy in the hierarchy of the Workers Party, a group of about three hundred people at the time. The names of his competitors, party names, were as comical as the underlying self-importance of the contestants: Miller,

Young, Gates, all young men whose families were known by names such as Rosenberg, Feinstein, Rivkin.

I was in this movement no more than a week before I was introduced to my first "faction fight." Overall such faction fights took up much more time and energy than any agitation against capitalism or for "socialism."

In that summer of 1941 the Workers Party had three or four internal cliques, "factions." There were Johnsonites, Carterites, and Shachmanites in the narrow factional sense, and a number of others. These factions quarreled over how to describe the Soviet Union "correctly." All produced numerous proof texts from Marx and Lenin and Trotsky.

The background to this disputation was yet another disputation that had taken place the previous year in the Socialist Workers Party, from which the Shachtmanites had just split. In that original group, James Cannon supported Trotsky's theory that the Soviet Union, while run by a despicable dictator, was nevertheless a "workers state" and required the "unconditional defense" of the workers of the world. Shachtman had demurred somewhat, proposing a theory of "bureaucratic collectivism," which held that the Soviet Union was ruled by something less than a workers state. On this basis, Shachtman had split the Socialist Workers Party in half, forming his own Workers Party, and becoming, not coincidentally, a new Leader of a revolutionary party. Or rather, in his own

view, *the* leader of *the* revolutionary party. All this had taken place in 1940.

Now it is 1941, and there is a new faction fight, now in the Workers Party. Where Shachtman maintained his theory of "bureaucratic collectivism," Jimmy Johnson, the leader of one of the competing factions, said the Soviet Union was capitalist; no other interpretation would be authentically Marxist. And since it was capitalist, said Johnson, no, the Soviet Union must *not* be defended. . (How would we, New York Trotskyists, do such defending ? It was a question that did not occur to anyone.) Freddy Forest, a middle-aged woman who was one of Johnson's closest acolytes, got up in one of the discussion meetings and referred to "Comrade Marx" to buttress this point. But that was a slip in nomenclature. There were a few mild chuckles before she quickly retracted and repeated her sentence without the "Comrade."

Max Shachtman kept saying, also with proper Marx-Lenin-Trotsky citation, that no, the Soviet Union is not capitalist. Since the government has nationalized industry, how can the country be capitalist ? No, it is something new, a new form of exploitation, for which Shachtman coined the phrase is bureaucratic collectivism. Obviously, bureaucratic collectivism cannot be a good thing. Hasn't the Old Man himself, Trotsky, taught us in his writings (and here Shachtman would quote first chapter, then verse, and then more verse) hasn't the Old Man himself recounted the evils of the Stalinist bureaucracy ? The Soviet Union, obviously, in the

words of the title of the Old Man's immortal pamphlet, represents a Revolution Betrayed. But then, suddenly, inexplicably to many of his followers, Shachtman changed his story. No, bureaucratic collectivism is not really good, no, not good. But still, still, it is better than capitalist. It is, and then Shachtman used a particular piece of Marxist sophistry, bureaucratic collectivism is nevertheless "progressive." So we have to defend the Soviet Union. (Some time in the future Shachtman was to shed any trace of pro-Sovietism).

But there was also a third position, to which I myself was most attracted. It was the view of Comrade Joseph Carter (also known by a Jewish name in his job as a book store clerk), who theorized that no, Russia was not capitalist; yes, Russia was "bureaucratic collectivist," but no, this is no better than capitalism, so there is no need to defend the place.

All this had to do with the internal politics of the Workers Party when I joined its youth section, at the end of June in 1941. Beyond all the backbiting and jockeying for position in a comically miniscule little sect, these internal politics were also marked by a high seriousness which I respected long after I abandoned all allegiance to any sort of Marxism. We concerned ourselves with some of the great problems of the time -- Stalinism, Hitlerism -- and we perceived that they mattered to us as individuals.

The positions that the Shachtmanites directed to the outside world were, in retrospect, less serious. They were the orthodox tenets of the

Marxist-Trotskyism of the day: the rotten capitalist system must be replaced; the war in Europe is an imperialist war; we support neither London nor Berlin. My friend Phil Young (to call him by his proletarian, American, i.e. non-Jewish party name) explained to me: "Down With the Imperialist War" is our best slogan. And it really sounded good to me. To my mother and her friends, all refugees from Nazi Germany, it would have sounded crazy. That's what was so good about being a revolutionary: doing what to parents and family was unthinkable. But I never told my mother what kind of a group I had become involved with. She would have forbidden me to do this or anything like it.

Reva Crane was "city organizer" of the WP. Her leadership position was high but not very high. (Her husband's was very high, he was on the "political committee" of the WP, the head governing group.) I confided to Reva one day, while we were both in the same room waiting for a meeting to start, that I "had to" lie to my mother about being in the WP. I always told my mother that I was going to a Zionist meeting when in fact I was going to YPSL or WP functions. Reva, who had just become a mother, sighed. It's terrible for them, she said. The older generation cannot win the battle against its own children. I was surprised to hear a word of sympathy for the bourgeois parents from the lips of one of my comrades.

When the Second World War started, the international Trotskyist movement declared it an "imperialist war," seeing no reason to favor one

side over the other. This was a reflex reaction from people who looked upon themselves as the political heirs of the Russian Bolsheviki of 1914 and their Communist comrades in the other European countries. These Leninists had distinguished themselves from their Socialist competitors by denouncing the First World War as "imperialist" on all sides. Now, in 1939 and throughout the Second War, the Trotskyists repeated these slogans of 1914-18. So fixed were they on this anti-war tradition that when the realities of the Holocaust reached the outside world in 1945, it did not register with the Trotskyists, either then or at any time thereafter.

But as I say, the Russian question exercised both Shachtman and Carter in the Workers Party internal discussion, and both of these could see that old formulas would no longer do in the new world of the dictators.

But the other leading participant in these discussions, Jimmy Johnson, saw little need for rethinking old categories of thought. To some extent he agreed with Shachtman and Carter, and disagreed with Trotsky, holding that the Soviet Union is not a "workers state." But from this Johnson argued with dogmatic Marxism: if not a workers state, that is to say if it isn't good, it's bad. And what is bad? Capitalism is bad. Ergo Russia is capitalist. That is what I got from Jimmy Johnson's polemic. I was fifteen years of age, and was bewildered by the very complex, opaque, baroque argumentation of all three of these leading comrades, Shachtman, Carter, Johnson, but nobody was as opaque, as baroque as Johnson and his acolytes.

Jimmy Johnson was a very tall, thin, black Trinidadian of extraordinary oratorical skills. Many of my women comrades became his followers, first and foremost the Russian-born Freddy Forest, but also, at least as striking, Ria Stone, a Chinese-American graduate student in philosophy. These three did a great deal of what they called "research" into the more obscure writings of Marx in order to bolster their claim that they were right about Russia. What Marx may or may not have meant when he wrote (or maybe did not write) a letter to a follower in 1853, say, became a crucial proof text to explicate the actions of the Bulgarian government in 1934, and, therefore, either way, would prove that Russia today, 1941, is capitalist. Yes, capitalist. And yes, Jimmy is right about all this, right about everything. He is a brilliant leader of the world proletariat.

By then I had already begun to haunt the great Reading Room of the New York Public Library on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street. The staff there no longer told me to go to the Children's Room on the ground floor. They treated me like an adult, and as a result I was able to look at adult writings. For example, I learned about the word "miscegenation" in that Reading Room, at a time when this word was still used by writers. But most of all, I met Freddy Forest up there, working on her "research" for Jimmy Johnson.

Freddy talked with me, not quite treating me as an adult but nevertheless as somebody close to that. She also treated me as a male,



which, given the difference in our ages, startled me more than a little. She was quite old, at least thirty.

I was the youngest person in the movement and attracted attention because of that, in various ways. Freddy took a kindly interest in my "education," which meant mainly my political indoctrination. She also explained something interesting about the NYPL Reading Room. When waiting for books to be delivered from the stacks, it is better to wait on the right side of the Reading Room than the left because the right side had recent library acquisitions that could be perused while waiting.

Freddy was interested in the fact that I had so recently arrived from Germany. She consulted me on German vocabulary items, and often I was able to supply the required information. The joke in the Party at the time was that Freddy could quote Marx in the original Russian, but her lack of German was a deficiency that she recognized.

Jimmy Johnson, it developed, had difficulties recognizing any such deficiency in himself.

One day Freddy told me that Jimmy wanted me to teach him German. It did not strike me then as amusing that someone who was regarded by his followers (and certainly by himself) as the leading Marxist theorist of the day knew no German. For many years, even long after the Workers Party was no more, Jimmy Johnson attracted a cult following around the world, both as sage of the proletarian revolution, and, in later years, also as sage of the Black revolution. Even his fellow Trinidadian V.

S. Naipaul paid him the honor of satirizing him, a bit mercilessly to be sure, in one of his novels.

So, back in 1941, when I was a boy of fifteen, I was invited to become a German teacher to one of the great men of the international revolutionary movement. I was not a member of his faction, the Johnsonites, otherwise I would have regarded him as *the* great leader of this movement. Nevertheless, I was not completely unsusceptible to the aura of leadership that surrounded him to his followers. So I arrived at Jimmy's Harlem apartment, no more than two or three blocks from City College where I later spent years of study, with all the embarrassment of my position: a mere child, both chronologically and in length of service to the revolution.

Jimmy bade me sit down and talked to me of his life as a teacher of men. In Trinidad to this very day, he said, in Trinidad where I taught so many years ago, they still talk about the Golden Age of James Johnson. But he did not say James Johnson. He called himself by his real name, which was supposed to be secret in the Party and out. After all, we were a conspiratorial organization, and all the rules of Bolshevist organization applied to us.

Of course I was greatly flattered that he trusted me so much that he would reveal his real name to me, in defiance of Party rules. But, young as I was, and absolutely naïve to match, I was still able to grasp the

ridiculous vanity of Jimmy's performance there in the downstairs parlor room of one of the stately old brownstones of Harlem.

The rest of this German lesson was taken up with more monologue by Jimmy. Of course he was wooing me to become one of his group, but that was not the primary purpose of his talk. As I saw it, he simply could not restrain himself in his gush of self-appreciation. Not a word of German passed between us. Not a word about anything having to do with German. By unspoken mutual agreement, this was the only session we had together.

Johnson never became my leader. He and the Johnsonites eventually left the Workers Party to rejoin the rival Socialist Workers Party from which both Shachtman and Johnson had split some years before. Moreover the Johnsonites did not stay in the Socialist Workers Party. They soon left that organization and then, in various forms and disguises, lead an independent existence for a few years.

Some time in the middle of the nineteen sixties (some twenty-five years after the events related here) Freddy Forest was on a speaking tour at the Western university where I was teaching. Only she no longer called herself Freddy Forest, the name under which she had been deputy leader of the Johnsonites in the Workers Party. Now she had a name that sounded bogus to me, although, unlike the name Freddy Forest, it may very well have been the name that she was born with. She was neither surprised nor particularly happy to see me. She attempted no flirtation, as she had at the

New York Public Library. She was only intent on discussing her current political campaign, that of Humanist Marxism, or something of the sort. Well, I said, how is Jimmy. Jimmy who, she wanted to know. You know, Jimmy, Jimmy Johnson. That bastard, she asked, but without a trace of humor. Of course I should have known that the Johnsonites, in due time, would split into competing grouplets. There is, after all, only one person who can be the bearer of Marx's aura, in any given cult. And as for humor, well, not then, not before, neither Freddy nor Jimmy himself could ever see anything funny at all about their self-assigned roles of teachers and leaders of the world proletariat.

I paid Jimmy a visit almost fifty years after my aborted German lesson, in London in 1989, just a few days before his death. I was struck then not only by the extraordinary frailty of the then very old man, but also by the fact that his equally extraordinary vanity had in no way diminished. I came to consult him on a project that I was working on at the time. I wanted to know more about the various attitudes to be found in the Trotskyist movement, at various stages of its history, toward things Jewish. Since Jimmy had been a very prominent Trotskyist leader, I thought his reminiscences could help me.

But Jimmy was neither interested in the question nor was he particularly eager trying to be of help. He urged me, instead, to read a number of his books. The young woman with whom he lived at the time rolled her eyes the way that Alzheimer attendants do, telling him that the

works he mentioned would not give any of the information that I was seeking. But Jimmy insisted. These books will provide needed background, he said. Jimmy, not an Alzheimer patient at all, seemed to be convinced that every word he had ever written would be of immense value to all researchers of all subjects. I had known Jimmy long before the young woman was born, and I knew that his talk now was not substantially different from what it had been fifty years back. Alas, his books, which I dutifully consulted, did not provide me with anything helpful; his girlfriend was proven right.

Being a Johnsonite was a folly I had escaped (only just). Being a Shachtmanite was not.

Before I met Max Shachtman in person, I had seen his name on the front page of the *New Internationalist*, the "theoretical" organ of the Workers Party. (There was also another periodical, presumably not "theoretical," *Labor Action*, which was distributed to the working masses at factory gates.) This issue of the *NI* carried a long article by Shachtman, full of ponderous words and ponderous ideas, which I forced myself to work through. I had a dictionary at my side, and after spending more time than I ever spent on homework, I satisfied myself that I understood the whole thing. With that apprenticeship done, I was ready for all the further "theoretical" articles and polemics that I was expected to master in my career as a rank-and-file member of the party of the world revolution.

At some time after my induction by Irving Howe, I encountered Max Shachtman at the headquarters of the Party and was in fact introduced to him. I was in the presence of a great man, I was given to understand, one of the great personalities of world history.

My previous brushes with greatness had all taken place in Berlin. I had a ticket to a soccer event at the Olympic games of 1936, held in Berlin, and I went all by myself to watch a match between the Germany and Hungary. But the most important event of the day was the appearance of Hitler at this game. At a great distance, but there he was in person. At another occasion, I was part of the great crowd that watched Hitler and Mussolini being driven in the street that transversed Berlin's *Tiergarten*. And at an auto show in Berlin, there was Herrmann Goering, surrounded by guards to be sure, but no more than ten feet from where I was.

My several meetings with Shachtman were quite different in some ways, similar in others. One big difference was that that Shachtman, the great man, was aware of my name, well, my Party name.

One of my encounters with Shachtman took place on the occasion of his visit to the Bronx branch of which I was a member. It was a meeting that was open to the public, and in fact there must have been at least ten to fifteen people present, instead of the five or six members that would come to closed gatherings. We had what was known as a "Shachtman meeting," the Leader speaking in person. Afterwards four or five of us, including Shachtman, went for cokes at a neighborhood candy store. All of us were

"comrades," except for one Manny, a hapless, obese, Jewish student with bad complexion and worse breath, who addressed Shachtman as if speaking to an equal. He argued with our leader without any embarrassment, without constraint, without deference. We were aghast. My friend Herman Fenwick, the "organizer" (chairman, leader, person in charge) of the Bronx branch, who from time to time had reason to reproach me for irreverence, later warned me gravely: You saw that Manny, didn't you. There but for the grace of God go you.

There but for the grace of God, this hackneyed phrase was fresh and new to me at the time. My new comrades were cultured, well-read, wise, and, God knows, sophisticated in a way my poor German Jewish refugee mother could never dream of. There but for the grace of God !

Of course I assumed then and thereafter that this phrase "there but for the grace of God" came from either Shakespeare or the King James Version. Actually it is credited to an obscure 16th century Protestant preacher, John Bradford, who was later burned on the stake during the reign of Bloody Mary. John Bradford is not mentioned in the Encyclopedia Britannica, nor does he figure in my abridged *Foxe's Martyrs of the World*, one of the essential sources of fundamentalist anti-Catholic agitation. But a complete version of Foxe does mention him, together with countless others similarly affected through the ages. Many, if we can trust the gory drawings in *Foxe*, were decapitated. It was not until 2004 that reports of decapitation of religious opponents once again became commonplace.

I was only dimly aware at the time how much we Shachtmanites were related to all such fanatics of history, martyrs and martyrizers both, religious and secular. There was no violence in the culture of our group, except perhaps in our readiness to condone and excuse the violence of the Bolsheviks. But in all other respects we were inheritors of the Anabaptists, Catholic inquisitors, Spanish anarchists, most particularly with regard to the quarrelsome disputationism of these European sectarians.

But the sectarian spirit was only the official tone of the group. Underneath, at least in the period that I was a member, there was also a lively, irreverent, interesting, sophisticated counter-culture. It is this counter-culture that makes many of us look back to our days in this movement as exciting and liberating.

Many of my fellow members were well read and broadly cultured, even in their teens. It was from such comrades that I first heard about Freud, Joyce, Mann, Frank Lloyd Wright, Kandinsky, Matisse. While my comrades discussed these, my fellow students at high school were totally innocent of all such high culture. But the people in the movement who cared for such things were not in the leadership. In fact, my friends and I made fun of the leaders and their philistinism; to us they were the "party hacks." Of course it could be said that these anti-philistines, including me, were as insufferable in their snobbishness as the "party hacks" in their dogmatism.



As my anti-philistinism made me doubt, first Shachtman, then Bolshevism, then Marxism and socialism, it became necessary in due time to leave the group. That was difficult, because at that time almost all my friends were still members. But once I made the decision to leave and so informed the city organizer of the Workers Party, early in 1948. I requested to be allowed to give my reasons in person to the branch. Whether or not I would be allowed to speak was taken up at a meeting in my absence. The branch voted against my request. Once you leave, I was told, you have no more standing here. One of my friends told me that Irving Howe lead the opposition to my request.

I still hung out, peripherally, near the 14th Street headquarters, to see my friends. One day Max Shachtman passed by, in person. He gave me a hard look and passed on. The practice of "cutting" a person was not familiar to me, actually. Irving Howe complained in his memoirs that Hannah Arendt "cut" him in this deliberate manner over a disagreement over Adolf Eichmann. It is, I understand, a European practice. In this, as in certain other ways, Max Shachtman introduced a European sensibility to the small world of Jewish radicals in New York.

## **Waldemar Schmidt**

None of this took place yesterday. Or the day before.

Computers were still unknown. There had been no Viet Nam war. President Kennedy was in the White House.

I heard Waldemar Schmidt speak at a sociological conference some two years before we became colleagues at Western University in Canada. His comments were wedged between those of two well-known scholars, and Schmidt showed the appropriate deference. “Before me, brilliant commentary from Harvard,” he said, or some such thing. “After me, elegant theory from Princeton.” And he gave a self-deprecating smile which I later learned was habitual in his public performances. He was displaying some of the charm and genius for conversation that were largely responsible for his later fame.

Obviously I noticed some foreign features in his speech. Was it an accent? An intonation? I later learned that he was a native of the Swabian city of Ulm in Germany, but his speech, whatever it was, was not harshly Germanic.

In the months before I actually moved west to join Schmidt's department at Western University, I had some encounters with people in the field that impressed upon me the extraordinary reputation that Schmidt, then still in his thirties, enjoyed among the highly placed.

I needed to see an important man at the University of Chicago, YD, on one of those errands of supplication that are obligatory upon the juniors in the profession. I wanted to "read a paper" at a meeting in a session that would be chaired by YD. Our talk went well for me; as YD put it, "you're on."

We chatted about this and that, my mentioning the new job I was about to start at Western University. And then it came, the comment that was to remain in my mind. "You

know that Andy Rays thinks that Schmidt is the smartest sociologist there is.” The smartest, the very smartest ? Rays, an older scholar (middle-aged then seemed older) was only vaguely familiar to me. Like Schmidt, he had a certain reputation for conversation, and also for insight, for insightful writing. When Rays died, many years later, a world famous scholar went out of his way to praise his great insights, even though, like Schmidt, Rays had done no research during his life.

While my talk with YD gave evidence of Schmidt’s standing with men of prestige, meeting Dorothy Reginald gave an entirely different, though complementary, impression.

Dorothy had been a crowned beauty queen some seven years before I happened to run into her at a regional sociological conference in the Midwest. This was in early 1960. What age are beauty queens ? Nineteen, twenty ? So when I met Dorothy in 1960, let’s say she was 27, give or

take. But she was still a graduate student. Maybe her beauty work had interfered with her career path.

As I did when I saw YD, I mentioned to Dorothy that I would soon be at Western. Dorothy told me that she had been a student at Western, and that, as a matter of fact, she still owned a house in Western City that, as she put it, she wouldn't mind if I considered buying. Wouldn't it be something, she giggled, if she could sell this house, right here at this conference.

But telling me about Schmidt animated her much more. Schmidt, she said, Schmidt is the man to know there, and what an opportunity it will be to work with this wonderful, insightful (that word again) scholar. How do you spell the name, I asked. Some crazy German way, she said.

My family and I arrived in Western City in August -- my wife, I, and three young children -- having traveled across the mountains by car. There were two other new hires in the department at Western whom we met when we arrived:

Columbia Harris from California and Steffi Levi from Wisconsin. Steffi had brought with her a young woman student with startling looks, Lois Himes. This Lois, who had just graduated magna cum laude from a small Midwestern college that described itself as “holding alluring vistas of the infinite tomorrow,” came from the city of Portage in Wisconsin. She said little but was much noticed.

Waldemar Schmidt was what I was most curious about in Western City. He turned out to be more sparkling, more intelligent, more original in every way than I had ever imagined an academic could be. Being in his presence suggested that there are possibilities beyond expectations. In all this, even with the high prestige that I knew he already enjoyed in the highest circles, he appeared to be a radical, oblivious of bourgeois obligations of deference. The high and mighty were fools and impostors, his conversation suggested, but you and I are the cognoscenti.

You and I. But how could I have been as interesting to him as he let me believe he thought I was ? Waldemar was thirty-seven at the time and I thirty-four, but professionally the gulf between us was enormous. Put most briefly, Waldemar was connected, well connected, and I was not at all. Would I call him Waldie ? No, I was soon given to understand, nobody could use his first name except in its full Germanic form: Waldemar, all syllables pronounced with equal stress.

Now that I think of the Waldemar of those days, there is a German verb, a favorite of mother's, that keeps coming to mind. I have been unable to find a satisfactory translation in the bi-lingual dictionaries, or even much of an explanation in the uni-lingual reference works. The verb is *schmunzeln*.

It is through *schmunzeln* that Waldemar made contact with those he charmed. It was a conspiratorial smiling, suggesting you and me against the world. James Kimberley, Waldemar's boss and mine, the Head (no, not "chairman") of

our department, and one of the rare skeptics of Schmidt in those years, had a sneer for this: "Waldemar's play for instant intimacy."

That first month in Western City was a whirlwind of joy and fun. After four years in desolate Wisconsin winters and summers, I experienced Western City, mild in the summer and rainy at every other time, as a rebirth. Even the open-air, slightly honky-tonk and glitzy drive-in Chinese restaurants of Western City appeared to signify that I was now in a place that was exciting and alive, and free of snow, free of northern bleakness.

When Waldemar didn't have us over at his house -- a beautiful, stylish mansion, with a majestic view of ocean and mountains, outfitted with a rich private library and an attractive wife and three brainy children -- he came to our little faculty-housing apartment just to look in. Or he took



me for lunch at the Faculty Club. Sometimes he would ask other people to join us from around campus, or invite visitors from far and wide around the world.

One day he invited Bob White to lunch with us. White was a young physicist who had studied in England and who, as a sideline, had interested himself in socialist politics. His father had been a brigadier in the Canadian army. Though Canadian (and "North American," a term much used in Canada), White had acquired formal manners that I had never before seen in someone of my age. When we approached the table at which he was already seated, he got up to shake our hands, grinning and smiling all the way.

All three of us talked, talked and listened both. An active give and take. Again, a novel experience for someone accustomed to the bluster and boorishness of the cold Midwest.

As always, Waldmar insisted on his characteristic post-mortem a few days after this luncheon. What did you think

of White ? He then informed me that White had liked me, and that he, White, wants to do it again.

White lived not far from where we did, and my wife and I had some pleasant encounters with White and his wife, off campus. I mentioned this to Waldemar who then explained: yes, Bob is a very decent, nice, a very intelligent, and a very ineffectual man.

Ineffectual. Ineffectual about what ? Waldemar gave no explanation. What could this possibly mean ? We were not piece-rate workers. Nor were we men of business. Did Waldemar perhaps refer to some sort dreary university task like committee work, or, worse, academic politicking? To us, people like Waldemar and me, men of thought and insight, how could being "effectual" matter? On the other hand, it was of course pleasing, flattering, to be included in Waldemar's little feuds. I simply cannot remember now whether I was wondering at the time: how does he talk about me behind my back ?

And then there was the peculiar "decent" in speaking about a colleague. Waldemar spoke a good, cultivated English, accented but fluent, but he did not always appear to think in English. "Decent" seems to have been his rendering of the German *anständig*, a snobbish expression sometimes used by Germans when referring to individuals of the lower classes.

Now that I look back on my acquaintanceship with Waldemar, his comments about Bob White that day foreshadowed the future. I did not protest and so I became complicit with him. Obviously, looking back, I know that I should have turned a glass eye instead of grinning, or whatever I did in my embarrassment. But turning a glass eye to a flatterer takes more strength than I had at the time.

Those days of summer, before classes started, were spent in long lunches and long conversations. Waldemar had been a student and very special protégé of the great Builder

Edwards of Harvard University. Edwards was a thinker, more a thinker than, say, scholar, or, God forbid, researcher. Builder had been at Heidelberg in the nineteen twenties, where, though American, he had become German in style and manners. German, in the sense of Karl Marx and Max Weber and Oswald Spengler. It was all a matter of insight and deep understanding, the deep German kind of understanding for which the technical term is *verstehen*.

Many years after any of this happened, Peter Sellers played the character Chance in the movie "Being There." Chance is mentally deficient but is accepted as a sage because powerful people have taken to interpret his platitudes as profundities. It has been rumored that this character, Chance, was based on Builder Edwards.

Waldemar was Canadian by citizenship when I knew him, but he had been a German boy in the last years before the Second World War. He had been in the Hitler Youth, but that turned out to be a slipup on the part of the authorities

since his mother came from a Jewish family. Waldemar had known nothing of his mother's background. He found out about it one day when he voiced anti-Semitic opinions at home and his father had to fill him in. And then, in due course, the Hitler Youth expelled him. Soon his father sent him to Britain where Waldemar became an English boy scout and enjoyed sunny acclaim from teachers and age mates.

When the war broke out, Waldemar was seventeen.

The British authorities hastily established tribunals to classify the many German nationals on British soil. Some eighty thousand were adjudged refugees from Nazi oppression and were given a clean bill of health. An additional fifteen thousand were placed into intermediary categories.

But poor Waldemar, perhaps because of his Hitler Youth background, was put into the relatively small group "deemed suspect." These things got sorted out after a few months of detention, but had two lasting consequences for Waldemar's later life. First, the story of how he had been

"locked up" during the war became part of his permanent repertory of autobiographical self-mockery. Second, he escaped the fate of most of his age mates in Europe and America: he never served in the armed forces, and he therefore never suffered these years of delay and obstruction to a subsequent professional career. But this circumstance was only one of the reasons for his relatively high status at a relatively young age. Much more important was his relationship with Builder Edwards and others in the academic elite.

Waldemar's conversation was dazzling. There was no philosophy he did not understand (in the sense of *verstehen*, obviously), no name he could not drop, no gossip he had not heard right at its origin. And, with only limited exemption allowed for Builder Edwards and his closest votaries, there were no high-and-mighties he would not mock.

His remarks about James Kimberley, the department Head, had an edge. "He is an anti-Semite, he hates me."

This was wild, outrageous slander. (Slander, especially when amusing, was nothing that Waldemar ever shirked from.) But there was something that became known many, many years later, long after both men were dead. Kimberley, when a young administrator in a fashionable Eastern college, had indeed participated in the then-fashionable quota system that limited the enrollment of Jews at almost all private colleges. There was almost no way that Waldemar could have known this. Perhaps Waldemar sensed something that others would not, as very sensitive people often know things that may or may not be true. That is *verstehen*, or part of it.

Waldemar took an interest in the pretty Lois Himes, the girl who had traveled with Steffi Levi from the Midwest. He went up to her at a party at Steffi's apartment. He flattered her with questions about herself. He indicated that he thought her fascinating. Was that flirting? Was it wooing? Waldemar wooed everyone and flirted with everyone; in

that respect, he did not believe in sexual discrimination. He asked her where she came from. When he heard that it was Portage in Wisconsin, he told her that U.S. highway 51 goes there. And then he proceeded to explain to her about the Wisconsin River, running within a mile of Portage. Later Lois told me that in the course of his disquisition he had confused Wisconsin Dells with Wisconsin Rapids, but never mind, his chatter was impressive. Would he have been able to do as well if Lois had come from International Falls in Minnesota ?

Lois was laid back. Her responses to Waldemar were mostly limited to smiles. Had she ever tried, she could have competed for Beauty Queen no less than Dorothy Reginald.

Waldemar spoke to my wife and me about Lois the next day, in our apartment. I know the type, Waldemar said, the single-mother type. Waldemar certainly had a gift for the *mal parler*. As in his comment on James Kimberley, there was no earthly justification, but there was a little



something that he may have sensed, and then turned into an ugly caricature, that was indeed there. Some years after this conversation, Lois became an all-too passive victim of a sexual predator. Later she married someone else and in due course she became a grandmother. She was never a single mother.

Columbia Harris, a new hire that summer like myself, quickly became Waldemar's votary. He was a man, despite his feminine first name. His parents, Eastern European Jewish immigrants, wanted a connection to Columbia University. He had a fatty round face adorned with mustache and an enormous belly. All of his soft tissue would move, wave-like, when he signaled applause for Waldemar's *bon mots*.

Some months later I heard Columbia lecture to a very large class. I happened to pass by the lecture hall; the door was ajar. Columbia was strutting and declaiming, as always

a fearless, vociferous defender of the most popular causes of the day. I was embarrassed for him. At around this time, too, Columbia told me, as something surprising and remarkable about himself, that he never felt as free and happy as when lecturing before a large class.

Since Columbia at that stage was still working on his Ph.D., he was at Western in a more probationary position than I. Technically I was his senior. That first summer, still before the start of our first academic year, Columbia was asked to give an informal seminar for faculty and graduate students. He talked about the small grocery store that his father operated in San Francisco and how he had helped there while a boy. Steffi told me afterwards that Columbia's talk amounted to no more than off-the-cuff *bavardage*, and boring to boot.

Columbia offered his observations as contributions to the *verstehen* of life in a grocery store, and later, much later,

Columbia was to publish, by his own count, seventeen books and thirty-three articles, all devoted to contemplation and *verstehen*.

My own experience with seminars was a great deal less fortunate.

Shortly after classes started in the fall, Waldemar called me on the phone: you are giving a seminar in my graduate course on Contemporary Theory. Don't worry, it will be fun. Talk about anything you like. It's tomorrow at 8 p.m., in that nice cozy conference room at the Library. I'll take care of the coffee.

I had some months before presented a technical paper concerning the measurement of prestige at a sociological forum in St. Louis. Could that be called "theory" in Waldemar's sense? Was it *verstehen*? It would have to do.

Waldemar had invited some others to this seminar as well. When I arrived he introduced me to Richard Cole, a senior graduate student at Harvard, who had been an

undergraduate at Western. A quiet, lanky man, some seven years younger than I, he was later to be my colleague for many years and one of my best friends.

Waldemar wasted little time in introducing me, and the floor was mine. I began to speak about the background to my work on inequality measurement, some throw-away sentences. But no, Waldemar interjected, that cannot be, referring to something I thought had no importance. I felt my forehead flush but soldiered on.

When I came to what I had thought was the novelty in my paper, a small point but one that had earned me a publication in a major journal, Waldemar's interruptions became full-blown sarcasm. Just a minute, I'll explain this later, I said. But don't you realize that you're being ridiculous, he countered.

The sensation I experienced was not altogether novel. As a new driver during a previous winter on Wisconsin's icy

highways, I had several times thought that the car I was driving was out of control and headed toward a fatal skid.

None of the students said a word. They watched their elders quarrel. That is how academic work is being conducted, they were being instructed. If you're stupid, especially if stupid with a Ph.D., you need to be told, and told in public. Richard Cole, the visitor from Harvard, remained gravely silent.

No, I didn't pack up and leave Western. It was not practicable. But the first period of my relationship to Waldemar was over.

Columbia Harris and Steffi Levi had been courted by Waldemar in their first weeks at Western, as I had. But their relationships did not suffer the same rupture. Harris was absolutely steadfast in his allegiance to Waldemar, in his words, his deeds, in his gestures, even in the movements of his eyebrows. Steffi had been aloof from the beginning. As a

statistician, she had no background or interest in *verstehen*, and Waldemar had little interest in her.

Toward the end of the summer we were, still, a group of friends, doing things together: Waldemar, his wife Elizabeth, Columbia Harris, my wife and I, and a few others. We were all to drive to a neighboring town to attend a big left-wing rally. This wasn't a matter of our politics. It was something we felt would be fun to watch. After all, we were mostly sociologists.

Waldemar couldn't make it, he said at the last minute. No, he had important, essential things to do. We knew that he was working with Builder Edwards of Harvard on editing a big volume of "classic" writings by sociologists of the past, so we assumed that this duty prevented him from participating in our own much more frivolous pursuits.

Columbia Harris had volunteered to drive some of us. When he arrived at our apartment to pick us up, Elizabeth Schmidt, Waldemar's wife, was already in his car. Columbia

was bursting to tell us this funny story: Waldemar told him to drive his wife Elizabeth because he, Waldemar, could not make it. So, Columbia said, Waldemar told him: "you have all the obligations but none of the privileges of a husband." Columbia laughed and giggled and couldn't get over how funny it was, how witty Waldemar had been, and how witty he, Columbia, was in conveying this to us. "All the obligations, none of the privileges."

Edward Asquith was an older member of the department. Born in England, he had been a graduate student at Princeton University, where he had received an MA degree in sociology. How and why he failed to receive a Ph.D. was a mystery to all of us. In those days it was not as unusual as it is now for someone to teach at a respectable university without the doctorate. But Asquith was given a number of administrative positions in the university, and it was apparently felt that he was able to make a defensible

contribution to the life of the university, despite the fact that he had never done research of his own.

I could not admire Ed Asquith in those days. I was dazzled by Waldemar's *verstehen* and felt great respect for Steffi's mathematical analyses. But worst of all for Asquith, it seemed that Waldemar never bothered to talk with him. These circumstances conspired to make Asquith uninteresting to the likes of me.

But one evening Ed Asquith and I had a conversation of a sort that is usually had only between intimate friends. We weren't intimate friends, perhaps not friends at all, but Ed had a need to tell me about a problem that he was having with Waldemar at that time.

I had to do with Ed's wife, Thelma. It seems that the Schmidts and the Asquiths, fairly close neighbors, had been seeing a great deal of one another over a period of a few months. And it also seems that Waldemar showered a great deal of flirtatious attention on Thelma. He was wooing her,



one might say. Well, given Waldemar's customary manners, there was no necessarily adverse implication here. As James Kimberley, the Head of the department, had noted, there was Waldemar's "gift for instant intimacy, with man and woman alike." Of course, that gift was not practiced on just anyone, only on just about anyone.

In Ed's telling of the story, he, Ed, did not experience jealousy, and this struck me as odd. Ed was dependent on Waldemar. It was Waldemar who supported Ed' administrative appointments at the university. It was Waldemar who assured everyone that Ed was a nice guy and extremely useful to have around for bureaucratic tasks. It was Waldemar, not least of all, who sponsored yet another planned publication of a "reader," an anthology of sociological writings, for which Ed had been selected as managing editor.

No, Ed was not a jealous husband, in no way was he even possessive. The problem was of a different sort. It

seems that one fine day Waldemar walked into the Asquith home and conspicuously ignored, "cut" Thelma. This he continued to do on all subsequent occasions that brought Waldemar and Thelma into contact. It also seems that Thelma was upset, greatly upset, greatly hurt by Waldemar's behavior, as was Ed. Waldemar offered no explanation. Finally Ed broached the subject to Waldemar.

Did Thelma say something to upset you ? Ed asked Waldemar. You ignore her, talk right by her. Did she offend you in some way ?

Well, according to Ed, this is what Waldemar told him: No no no, no offense, none at all. But you see, Waldemar said to Ed, the situation has become too symmetric. Too symmetric ? Yes, too symmetric.

That was that, Waldemar and Thelma. It was over. I was surprised that Ed's outrage at Waldemar, expressed as far as I know to nobody but me, seemed to have no trace of

humiliation about himself. He was outraged only because Thelma was suffering.

Soon a major publishing house released the anthology that Waldemar and Builder Edwards had edited. Waldemar lobbied very intensely with his colleagues to adopt this book as required readings in their courses. Some did and some did not. I admired the quality of some of the writings in this book, but it had no relevance to what I was teaching and therefore I did not adopt it. Waldemar was furious. I know what you are doing, he said to me, I know exactly what you are doing. You are boycotting my book. This is a provocation.

No, he did not know what I was doing. "Boycotting" his book, any book, had no more entered my mind than it would have entered the mind of ninety-nine percent of all the professors I have ever known. But Waldemar was fond of the word "boycott," by which he meant a secret, underhanded

activity by people aligned against him. He also liked the term "provocation," which, in his usage, was hardly distinguishable from "boycott." Waldemar was beginning to practice more *verstehen*, Steffi said to me, than is good for him or for the rest of us.

## II

The years passed. Waldemar rose in the hierarchy of the university. In very short order he was made full professor, and then, more or less overnight, he was appointed Provost of the University.

Waldemar's circle of intimates (sometimes hostile intimates) now began to include more and more people outside the sociology department.

There were the Musselcrackers, for instance. Ted and Amy Musselcracker, husband and wife, had met as graduate students in history. Now they were both assistant professors

of history at Western. Ted made sure that his students got a grounding in the materialist conception of history. Amy did research in addition to teaching. Ted posted left-wing cartoons on the outside of his office door. Amy posted her office hours.

Ted's parents had been Old Left. In the old Communist Party in Chicago, in the early nineteen thirties, Black could meet White and Jew Christian, and cross-line romances gave zest to the political life. Ted's father came from a Jewish family, his mother from a line of Irishmen. But never mind, all were comrades, and that is how Ted was conceived. In due time, when William Z. Foster was the leader -- Earl Browder having been safely jettisoned -- Ted himself took out CP membership.

Amy came from an all-Jewish family, but, at least as liberated as Ted's family, she had herself baptized born-again Christian in college, as part of a fling with a Pentecostal lesbian. All that was left far behind when she met Ted in

graduate school. As was Ted's Communist membership. By the time I met them at Western, the couple was simply, and strictly, progressive. They too had three young children. (Many years later Ted took up being Jewish of a sort: he helped to found the organization JAZ, "Jews Against Zionism.")

But no, they were a great deal more than progressive. There were now "T-groups" ("T" for training), with or without leaders, and some feminists had "consciousness-raising" evenings. There was a great variety of such groups. The general idea was that people, often previously strangers to one another, would meet for intimate conversation, very intimate conversation, sometimes for the financial gain of leaders, sometimes do-it-yourself. Ted and Amy, Ted more so than Amy, stood at the center of such activities for ten years in Western City.

Ted told me the story of Kurt Strom, a man whom he would frequently see at T-groups. This man had had an

academic education in Germany but was now forced to make a living as a movie house owner. "So this is how it would go," Ted began. "Ted meets, let us say, a couple. He invites them for dinner to his family. His wife is there, and also this really attractive daughter of his. She is a student of mine, you know. Then at the Stroms, there is this long conversation way past midnight. It gets very intense. Well... Tell me, he hasn't invited you, not yet?"

No he hadn't, and he didn't at any time. In fact, I was never to lay eyes on Kurt Strom, though I was introduced to his daughter on campus.

But I did meet Kurt Strom's wife Alice, an American woman in her fifties at the time. It was a brief encounter. I was pointed out to her in a coffee shop on campus as a friend of Ted Musselcracker, and Alice came up to me. She had a concern, maybe even a complaint, against Professor Musselcracker. It seems that the Stroms's daughter Grace was enrolled in an experimental seminar that Musselcracker

offered for a specially selected group of students. "Marx, Freud, and Marcuse as Historians," something along that line. It seems that Grace, "actually working her ass off," could not achieve the "A" on her presentations that she, according to her mother, deserved so obviously.

I'll have a chat with Ted, I promised her. When I did mention the incident to Ted -- we were close enough in those days so I could do this without any embarrassment -- well, he said, well. He shook his head gravely. No, it's still there. Still there ? Yes, still there in all its glory. Grace's ass.

Waldemar's friendship with the Musselcrackers was very different from his friendly relations with Isaiah Goldman.

Goldman was also in the history department, but he was far removed from any hint of progressiveness, political or scholarly; he had no interest whatever in the "new age" that was just about to emerge at Western (under the sponsorship of the Musselcrackers and others), let alone T-



groups or other experimentation with trans-marital erotics. Goldman's one book, written years earlier, recounted the history of the Jewish community of Greater Toronto. He took pride in being an Orthodox Jew and wore this denomination's skull cap at the Jewish Community Center downtown. Would he wear a yarmulke on campus ? Under some circumstances, perhaps ? In the meantime, no, he did not wear the cap except in Jewish surroundings. He was a member of the university's senate.

In the Jewish community, Goldman was known as "Dr. Goldman." Of course all of us had Ph.D.'s, but the title "Dr." was not used by any of us except on campus where it was in fact employed, although only by students and secretaries. But Goldman was always "Dr. Goldman" in town, with the result, which he inexplicably did not seem to recognize, that university people thought him vain and low-brow.

Where the Musselcrackers were a decade younger than Schmidt, and Goldman somewhat older, Charles Carrier was

a young man, almost a generation younger than Waldemar. He turned up in the sociology department at Western some two years after me and was immediately and intensively courted by Waldemar. Carrier was in the process of writing an enormously ambitious book on how mathematics can be used in the social sciences. He had no formal background in mathematics, but he was able to assimilate some of the essentials in very short order. Charles was not at all a man of *verstehen*, but to Waldemar, Charles Carrier's intellectual ambition and non-conformity almost made up for his lack of deference to *verstehen* and to himself.

Two weeks after Waldemar was named Provost of the University, he announced to the assembled faculty that he was about to revamp completely the existing departmental structure of the university. Two weeks after that, he announced that he had appointed a Committee, a Restructuring Committee, an R.C., that would meet in retreat over the coming Christmas holidays and formulate plans.

Members of the R.C.: Schmidt, Ted Musselcracker, Charles Carrier, Isaiah Goldman, Columbia Harris, two others yet to be named, and three students also to be announced. I noticed that all the named members were Jewish or had come from Jewish or partly Jewish families. Jews made up perhaps ten percent of the faculty as a whole. I noticed the anomaly. Did others ? It would not have been comfortable to discuss this with anyone I talked with.

Schmidt wanted to do away with academic departments. He made it clear that he wanted a scheme of teaching, across the university and without regard to academic discipline, based vaguely on the philosophy of the T-groups that were in vogue at the moment. A teaching relationship based on one-on-one contact between tutor and pupil, and lots of deep, psychological exploration of emotional relationships.

Western was not a new university. It had an organization that had been established for the better part of a

century. While not an elite university, its academic departments were nevertheless based on research, and on a faculty who saw their careers depending on scholarly research.

What Waldemar was saying to the faculty here was that their academic careers and opportunities at other universities needed to be jettisoned for the sake of T-group experimentation. Obviously, Waldemar would not get support for this scheme, except from a minority who did not see themselves as research scholars to begin with. That much was obvious. But how could he have thought that his famous charm would carry him through with this ? Steffi Levi leaned over to me at one of these meetings: "The poor guy has lost it. He's over the edge."

The R.C, the Restructuring Committee, made its report to an assembled faculty in February. Waldemar gave the introduction. "Some time between Chanukah and Christmas," he began. There was the *Schmunzeln*, the self-

deprecatory, obliging, *sympathique* engagement with his audience. "Some time between Chanukah and Christmas, the R.C., which you entrusted with this task..." He went on for an hour, explaining how we would break through the conventional barriers, how we would all be creative, how this, in other words, would be the beginning of a kinder, warmer, more humane learning and teaching right here at Western University.

Well, people were polite. The upshot was that a small "pilot" program involving six professors would be instituted, immediately. The rest would await further deliberation. That particular "pilot" program lasted many years. But the grand scheme that Waldemar had so urgently pressed upon his colleagues died a quiet death before it was born.

Some months after this "report" by the Restructuring Committee, I encountered Isaiah Goldman at a Jewish function downtown where he was wearing his yarmulke. "Look, Iz", I said, "look, this RC scheme, abolishing

departments, surely you didn't believe that that would fly, or even that it should fly." He looked at me and said, "no, I never believed in it." We looked at one another for a few moments, and then, "what do you think, for Chrissakes," he said, "I would vote for it without believing in it? Of course I believe in it. I still do."

Goldman made jokes without being a man of humor. There was no laughter, nothing outrageous or joyous or stimulating. I knew that his "I never believed in it," his "joke," was what he thought, or at least would like to think, when outside of Waldemar's presence. Isaiah Goldman was by no means a well-published scholar, but he was brought up in the conventional North American academy in which research was the standard by which a man's work was judged. In later years, long after the Restructuring Committee was disbanded, the whole R.C. episode was to become no more than a small, aberrant interlude in Goldman's career of modest but solid academic success.

Charles Carrier's work on the R.C. had a different meaning. Carrier later had a much more successful academic career than Goldman, but Carrier's writings straddled traditional fields and therefore traditional academic departments. And so Carrier had seen something of his own aspirations in Waldemar's R.C. scheme and could support it with much more conviction. But at the time of the R.C., Carrier was extremely junior in the faculty, and his little speeches in support of the scheme were without influence. Moreover, Carrier supported the plan with a style that differed very considerably from that of Waldemar. There was no *verstehen* baggage in Carrier's intellectual makeup, nor did Carrier ever, under any circumstances, participate in the T-group subculture of Western.

Waldemar's setback with his own faculty did not seem to lessen his ever-growing popularity with the student body or the circle of the cultured in town.

Despite his very demanding administrative duties as Provost, Waldemar insisted on offering a course of lectures for undergraduates. It was called "deviance," and dealt with crime, suicide, mental illness. Waldemar was never interested in social statistics, and, in fact, showed little sign of curiosity in the details of the first computer that arrived at the campus about that time. On the other hand, he soon began to use a certain amount of the new computer lingo -- Fortran, bits, bytes -- at meetings and in social situations, always with a smile. His few enemies at the time said it was a combination of smile and sneer, that he was being supercilious to hide his ignorance. But he was one of the first to develop an awe of the new technology, at a time when few others in the humanities were much aware of it.

Waldemar's lectures on "deviance" were free of numbers, let alone number crunching. It was a matter of deep understanding, *verstehen*, and much psychoanalysis. Many decades later I encountered people who had been his



students at the time and who remembered this course as an intellectual peak in their lives. None of this prevented Steffi Levi from scoffing: what a windbag !

Waldemar's standing in the cultural elite of the city was also growing. It was an elite that assembled in monthly chamber music concerts and also at talks given by visiting novelists. Many of these people were born in Europe, and many were physicians.

There was, for example, Maureen Risorski, who had made her mark world-wide as a translator of novels from modern Greek. She herself was born in England, but she was married to an American of Polish origins whose speech showed the inflection, but not quite the accent, of Greek. He was a physician in a general practice that seemed to be restricted to university faculty. Maureen was an unabashed and vociferous camp follower of Waldemar's. Many years later she joined others in this group to form a committee on

behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization. But by then Waldemar himself was long gone.

One day the university sponsored a symposium on translation, and Maureen was one of the speakers. Waldemar attended, which was unusual because "not having the time" for things had become a trademark of Waldemar in that period. I myself needed to see him on a number of occasions, but, when I could reach him by phone, was told "I haven't the time," repeatedly. Many of us had the same experience -- Waldemar had no time.

Well, Waldemar showed up for Maureen Risorski. She was then a lady in her forties, slightly older than Waldemar himself, but she was flustered when he approached her after her lecture. "Our roles have been reversed," I heard her tell him, with the pride of a high school girl dancing with the captain of the football team.

Another two years passed, and it was now February of 1965.

It was a rainy season in Western City, but all seasons, more or less, were rainy there. The student leadership at Western had conceived of an annual February retreat for small invited groups of faculty and students, called Academic Symposium. Two dozen faculty and an equal number of students went to a small resort on the water some three hours from the city. There were formal presentations of "papers," mostly by faculty, and much informal fraternizing. This year I was among the faculty who were invited, along with Charles Carrier, for the sociology department. There was also Dr. Nathan Meyer, a teaching psychiatrist in the Medical School, with whom I had conducted social science classes for nurses. The student leader in charge was William Robins, a student and follower of Waldemar's. Waldemar himself, of course, could not be present. He was Provost, and seldom

found the time. Another participant at this Symposium was a graduate student named Ghutar Singh. Later he was to become the leader of Canada's Marxist-Leninists, but at the time, aged twenty-six, he was the acknowledged sage of the Student Christian Movement at Western.

The topic for this year's Symposium was "Equality as Extremism," and I was scheduled to give my paper on "Social Stratification and the Ambivalence Hypothesis."

We left campus on two chartered buses on Friday, February 5, at three thirty in the afternoon. One of the women students entertained us in the bus with her singing. Not the folksongs of Joan Baez, as we would have expected, but the more recently fashionable sounds of Bossa Nova.

The resort was comfortable. The "papers" were not quite as tedious as their titles suggested. The food was carefully prepared by the owner of the resort. It was surprisingly fresh. Faculty gossiped mostly with other faculty. It turned out that everyone there was mostly on the

same sides of the various quarrels that were a feature of Western no less than of higher quality institutions.

The resort had a sauna, something not as familiar to us then as it was to become later. A professor of history remarked with great seriousness: "a weekend here, with the sauna and everything considered, will make you lose five pounds."

William Robins and Ghutar Singh, the student leaders, said little. But they flitted about, making themselves agreeable to faculty members. They were known for their advanced and radical views, but the activity that was many years later called *networking up* was not beneath them. Isaiah Goldman had told, in this connection, that one of his nephews had turned Ultra-Orthodox Jewish -- quite a few shades more Orthodox than he -- and that this boy had distinguished himself with a great gift for *kesher*, making contact, contact with the *gedoilim* the important rabbis.

*Kesher*, it seems, is the Hebrew-Yiddish equivalent of *networking up*.

On the second morning of the Symposium, Nathan Meyer, the psychiatrist who was one of the organizers of this year's symposium, called us all together for an announcement.

Meyer was organizing things all along. He had organized nursing education, and had organized, also, a joint article that would describe how faculty from several departments had cooperated on running a social science course for nursing students. Articles of this sort were frequently generated by members of the Medical School, and others, and fattened the bibliographies of faculty members. I had earned Meyer's dislike by refusing to sign on as a joint author.

Meyer had a serious mien this morning. He had an announcement to make. Would one of the participants have to miss reading his "paper" ? Would the final dinner have to

be cancelled because the buses needed to leave early for the city ? Something more grave than that ? What could cause him to call us all together, with such a grave face, on this little trip that was supposed to be devoted to gossip, gregariousness, and, for the students, networking with faculty ?

Well, yes, it was more serious. "I am terribly sad to report that I have just had a phone call to tell me that Provost Schmidt committed suicide last night. He jumped from his hospital room where he had spent a few days because of nervous exhaustion."

Of course there was an aftermath. We learned, for instance, that the window from which Waldemar had jumped had been locked, and that he apparently used a running start to jump through it, breaking the pane. This did not prevent the sociological journal from reporting that Provost Schmidt met his death through accident, "by falling from a window." Builder Edwards, America's unofficial dean of sociology and

former teacher of Waldemar, praised him profusely in a number of obituary articles.

After Meyer's announcement, some of us walked the beach of the resort to reflect on what had happened. Charles Carrier was grave but matter of fact. "What a terrible end. But we all know, of course, that Waldemar was a son of a bitch." Nobody contradicted him.

Back in town there was a lot of talk about why Waldemar killed himself. Ted Musselcracker claimed to know of a homosexual angle. "I personally know of a man that Waldemar slept with." Know ? Personally ? Was some sort of outing to be expected ? Others mentioned a psychiatric version. It seems that Waldemar's psychiatrist, a man who taught at our Medical School, was feuding with the psychoanalyst who saw Waldemar's wife, Elizabeth. It was a situation that threatened to go public, with nasty disclosures all around. But in the end nobody knew anything convincing.



On campus there was a well-attended memorial meeting. "I was not privileged to be among his intimate friends," said the university president, "but I share with them, and also with his family ...." and on and on and on. William Robins spoke on behalf of the student government. "He loved us as we loved him. Even this last deed of his was a sign of his great love for us all." This comment puzzled me, but it was accepted as the truth, if only the kind of deeper truth, *verstehen*, of which Waldemar had been so fond.