



# ERIC HOFFER

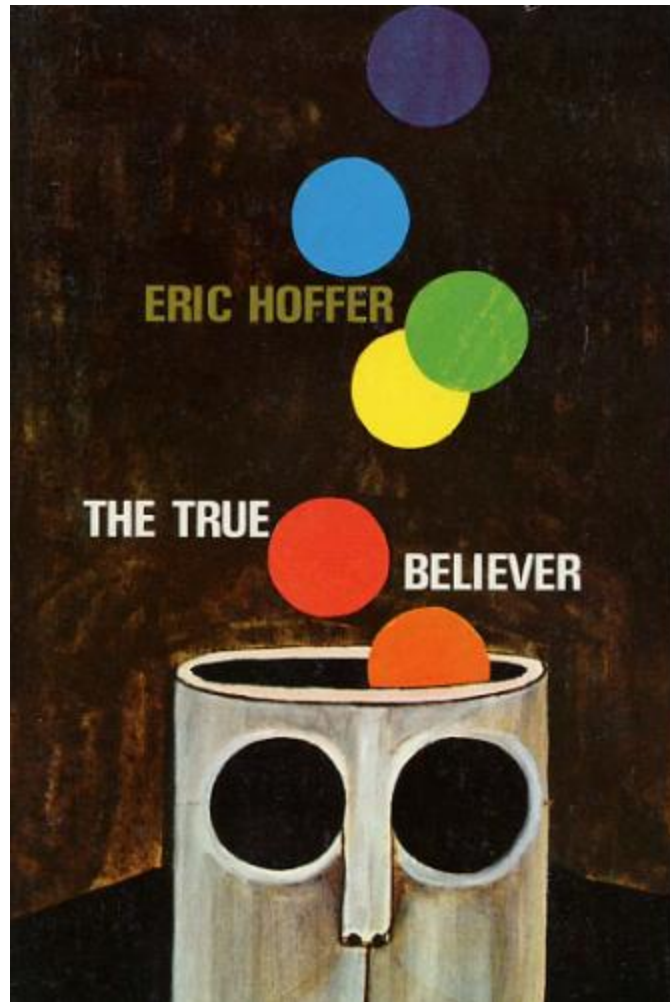
*"The True Believer glitters with icy wit . . . bristles with deadly parallels. . . . It is a harsh and potent mental tonic."* —*New York Times*

THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF MASS MOVEMENTS

# THE TRUE BELIEVER

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[Inside front cover]

Who is the True Believer?

*According to Eric Hoffer . . .*

He's the man who, multiplied by thousands, is shaping the world to his image.

He's a guilt-ridden hitchhiker who thumbs a ride on every cause from Christianity to communism.

He's a fanatic, needing a Stalin (or a Christ) to worship and die for.

He's the mortal enemy of things-as-they-are, and he insists on sacrificing himself for a dream impossible to attain.

He is today everywhere on the march.

Reporting on the true believer, Mr. Hoffer examines with Machiavellian detachment mass movements from Christianity in its infancy to the national uprisings of our own day. In any publishing season this would be a book to excite discussion and controversy, but world events now give it special urgency—for it helps to explain Stalin's "secret weapon," his ability to generate enthusiasm and self-sacrifice in all manner of people, his need to make a devil of the United States.

No. 8542

# **The True Believer**

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## **Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements**

by ERIC HOFFER

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS New York and Evanston

# THE TRUE BELIEVER

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16, N. Y.  
M-S

To  
MARGARET ANDERSON  
without whose goading finger  
which reached me across a continent  
this book would not have been written

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

—Pascal, *Pensées*

And slime had they for mortar.

—Genesis II

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## **Preface** \_\_\_\_\_

This book deals with some peculiarities common to all mass movements, be they religious movements, social revolutions or nationalist movements. It does not maintain that all movements are identical, but that they share certain essential characteristics which give them a family likeness.

All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them, irrespective of the doctrine they preach and the program they project, breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance; all of them are capable of releasing a powerful

flow of activity in certain departments of life; all of them demand blind faith and singlehearted allegiance.

All movements, however different in doctrine and aspiration, draw their early adherents from the same types of humanity; they all appeal to the same types of mind.

Though there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalist, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one. The same is true of the force which drives them on to expansion and world dominion. There is a certain uniformity in all types of dedication, of faith, of pursuit of power, of unity and of self-sacrifice. There are vast differences in the contents of holy causes and doctrines, but a certain uniformity in the factors which make them effective. He who, like Pascal, finds precise reasons for the effectiveness of Christian doctrine has also found the reasons for the effectiveness of Communist, Nazi and nationalist doctrine. However different the holy causes people die for, they perhaps die basically for the same thing.

This book concerns itself chiefly with the active, revivalist phase of mass movements. This phase is dominated by the true believer—the man of fanatical faith who is ready to sacrifice his life for a holy cause—and an attempt is made to trace his genesis and outline his nature. As an aid in this effort, use is made of a working hypothesis. Starting out from the fact that the frustrated<sup>1</sup> predominate among the early adherents of all mass movements and that they usually join of their own accord, it is assumed:

1) that frustration of itself, without any proselytizing prompting from the outside, can generate most of the peculiar characteristics of the true believer; 2) that an effective technique of conversion consists basically in the inculcation and fixation of proclivities and responses indigenous to the frustrated mind.

To test the validity of these assumptions, it was necessary to inquire into the ills that afflict the frustrated, how they react against them, the degree to which these reactions correspond to the responses of the true believer, and, finally, the manner in which these reactions can facilitate the rise and spread of a mass movement. It was also necessary to examine the practices of contemporary movements, where successful techniques of conversion had

been perfected and applied, in order to discover whether they corroborate the view that a proselytizing mass movement deliberately fosters in its adherents a frustrated state of mind, and that it automatically advances its interest when it seconds the propensities of the frustrated.

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

It is perhaps not superfluous to add a word of caution. When we speak of the family likeness of mass movements, we use the word "family" in a taxonomical sense. The tomato and the nightshade are of the same family, the Solanaceae. Though the one is nutritious and the other poisonous, they have many morphological, anatomical and physiological traits in common so that even the non-botanist senses a family likeness. The assumption that mass movements have many traits in common does not imply that all movements are equally beneficent or poisonous. The book passes no judgments, and expresses no preferences. It merely tries to explain; and the explanations—all of them theories—are in the nature of suggestions and arguments even when they are stated in what seems a categorical tone. I can do no better than quote Montaigne: "All I say is by way of discourse, and nothing by way of advice. I should not speak so boldly if it were my due to be believed."

## **PART ONE —————**

### **The Appeal of Mass Movements**

#### **I —————**

### **The Desire for Change**

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

Not so obvious is the fact that religious and nationalist movements too can be vehicles of change. Some kind of widespread enthusiasm or excitement is apparently needed for the realization of vast and rapid change, and it does not seem to matter whether the exhilaration is derived from an expectation of untold riches or is generated by an active mass movement. In this country the spectacular changes since the Civil War were enacted in an atmosphere charged with the enthusiasm born of fabulous opportunities for self-advancement. Where self-advancement cannot, or is not allowed to, serve as a driving force, other sources of enthusiasm have to be found if momentous changes, such as the awakening and renovation of a stagnant society or radical reforms in the character and pattern of life of a community, are to be realized and perpetuated. Religious, revolutionary and nationalist movements are such generating plants of general enthusiasm.

In the past, religious movements were the conspicuous vehicles of change. The conservatism of a religion—its orthodoxy—is the inert coagulum of a once highly reactive sap. A rising religious movement is all change and experiment—open to new views and techniques from all quarters. Islam when it emerged was an organizing and modernizing medium. Christianity was a civilizing and modernizing influence among the savage tribes of Europe. The Crusades and the Reformation both were crucial factors in shaking the Western world from the stagnation of the Middle Ages.

In modern times, the mass movements involved in the realization of vast and rapid change are revolutionary and nationalist—singly or in combination. Peter the Great was probably the equal, in dedication, power and ruthlessness, of many of the most successful revolutionary or nationalist leaders. Yet he failed in his chief purpose, which was to turn Russia into a Western nation. And the reason he failed was that he did not infuse the Russian masses with some soul-stirring enthusiasm. He either did not think it necessary or did not know how to make of his purpose a holy cause. It is not strange that the Bolshevik revolutionaries who wiped out the



last of the Czars and Romanovs should have a sense of kinship with Peter—a Czar and a Romanov. For his purpose is now theirs, and they hope to succeed where he failed. The Bolshevik revolution may figure in history as much an attempt to modernize a sixth of the world's surface as an attempt to build a Communist economy.

The fact that both the French and the Russian revolutions turned into nationalist movements seems to indicate that in modern times nationalism is the most copious and durable source of mass enthusiasm, and that nationalist fervor must be tapped if the drastic changes projected and initiated by revolutionary enthusiasm are to be consummated. One wonders whether the difficulties encountered by the present Labor government in Britain are not partly due to the fact that the attempt to change the economy of the country and the way of life of 49,000,000 people has been initiated in an atmosphere singularly free from fervor, exaltation and wild hope. The revulsion from the ugly patterns developed by most contemporary mass movements has kept the civilized and decent leaders of the Labor party shy of revolutionary enthusiasm. The possibility still remains that events might force them to make use of some mild form of chauvinism so that in Britain too "the socialization of the nation [might have] as its natural corollary the nationalization of socialism."<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenal modernization of Japan would probably not have been possible without the revivalist spirit of Japanese nationalism. It is perhaps also true that the rapid modernization of some European countries (Germany in particular) was facilitated to some extent by the upsurge and thorough diffusion of nationalist fervor. Judged by present indications, the renaissance of Asia will be brought about through the instrumentality of nationalist movements rather than by other mediums. It was the rise of a genuine nationalist movement which enabled Kemal Atatürk to modernize Turkey almost overnight. In Egypt, untouched by a mass movement, modernization is slow and faltering, though its rulers, from the day of Mehmed Ali, have welcomed Western ideas, and its contacts with the West have been many and intimate. Zionism is an instrument for the renovation of a backward country and the transformation of shopkeepers and brain workers into farmers, laborers and soldiers. Had Chiang Kai-shek known how to set in motion a genuine mass movement, or at least sustain the nationalist enthusiasm kindled by the Japanese invasion, he might have been acting now as the renovator of China. Since he did not know how, he

was easily shoved aside by the masters of the art of "religiofication"—the art of turning practical purposes into holy causes. It is not difficult to see why America and Britain (or any Western democracy) could not play a direct and leading role in rousing the Asiatic countries from their backwardness and stagnation: the democracies are neither inclined nor perhaps able to kindle a revivalist spirit in Asia's millions. The contribution of the Western democracies to the awakening of the East has been indirect and certainly unintended. They have kindled an enthusiasm of resentment against the West; and it is this anti-Western fervor which is at present rousing the Orient from its stagnation of centuries.<sup>2</sup>

Though the desire for change is not infrequently a superficial motive, it is yet worth finding out whether a probing of this desire might not shed some light on the inner working of mass movements. We shall inquire therefore into the nature of the desire for change.

## 2

There is in us a tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves. Success and failure are unavoidably related in our minds with the state of things around us. Hence it is that people with a sense of fulfillment think it a good world and would like to conserve it as it is, while the frustrated favor radical change. The tendency to look for all causes outside ourselves persists even when it is clear that our state of being is the product of personal qualities such as ability, character, appearance, health and so on. "If anything ail a man," says Thoreau, "so that he does not perform his functions, if he have a pain in his bowels even ... he forthwith sets about reforming—the world."<sup>3</sup>

It is understandable that those who fail should incline to blame the world for their failure. The remarkable thing is that the successful, too, however much they pride themselves on their foresight, fortitude, thrift and other "sterling qualities," are at bottom convinced that their success is the result of a fortuitous combination of circumstances. The self-confidence of even the consistently successful is never absolute. They are never sure that they know all the ingredients which go into the making of their success. The outside world seems to them a precariously balanced mechanism, and so long as it ticks in their favor they are afraid to tinker with it. Thus the resistance to change and the ardent desire for it spring from the same conviction, and the one can be as vehement as the other.

Discontent by itself does not invariably create a desire for change. Other factors have to be present before discontent turns into disaffection. One of these is a sense of power.

Those who are awed by their surroundings do not think of change, no matter how miserable their condition. When our mode of life is so precarious as to make it patent that we cannot control the circumstances of our existence, we tend to stick to the proven and the familiar. We counteract a deep feeling of insecurity by making of our existence a fixed routine. We hereby acquire the illusion that we have tamed the unpredictable. Fisherfolk, nomads and farmers who have to contend with the willful elements, the creative worker who depends on inspiration, the savage awed by his surroundings— they all fear change. They face the world as they would an all-powerful jury. The abjectly poor, too, stand in awe of the world around them and are not hospitable to change. It is a dangerous life we live when hunger and cold are at our heels. There is thus a conservatism of the destitute as profound as the conservatism of the privileged, and the former is as much a factor in the perpetuation of a social order as the latter.

The men who rush into undertakings of vast change usually feel they are in possession of some irresistible power. The generation that made the French Revolution had an extravagant conception of the omnipotence of man's reason and the boundless range of his intelligence. Never, says de Tocqueville, had humanity been prouder of itself nor had it ever so much faith in its own omnipotence. And joined with this exaggerated self-confidence was a universal thirst for change which came unbidden to every mind.<sup>1</sup> Lenin and the Bolsheviks who plunged recklessly into the chaos of the creation of a new world had blind faith in the omnipotence of Marxist doctrine. The Nazis had nothing as potent as that doctrine, but they had faith in an infallible leader and also faith in a new technique. For it is doubtful whether National Socialism would have made such rapid progress if it had not been for the electrifying conviction that the new techniques of blitzkrieg and propaganda made Germany irresistible.

Even the sober desire for progress is sustained by faith— faith in the intrinsic goodness of human nature and in the omnipotence of science. It is a defiant and blasphemous faith, not unlike that held by the men who set out to build "a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" and who

believed that "nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do."<sup>5</sup>

#### 4

Offhand one would expect that the mere possession of power would automatically result in a cocky attitude toward the world and a receptivity to change. But it is not always so. The powerful can be as timid as the weak. What seems to count more than possession of instruments of power is faith in the future. Where power is not joined with faith in the future, it is used mainly to ward off the new and preserve the status quo. On the other hand, extravagant hope, even when not backed by actual power, is likely to generate a most reckless daring. For the hopeful can draw strength from the most ridiculous sources of power—a slogan, a word, a button. No faith is potent unless it is also faith in the future; unless it has a millennial component. So, too, an effective doctrine: as well as being a source of power, it must also claim to be a key to the book of the future.<sup>6</sup>

Those who would transform a nation or the world cannot do so by breeding and captaining discontent or by demonstrating the reasonableness and desirability of the intended changes or by coercing people into a new way of life. They must know how to kindle and fan an extravagant hope. It matters not whether it be hope of a heavenly kingdom, of heaven on earth, of plunder and untold riches, of fabulous achievement or world dominion. If the Communists win Europe and a large part of the world, it will not be because they know how to stir up discontent or how to infect people with hatred, but because they know how to preach hope.

#### 5

Thus the differences between the conservative and the radical seem to spring mainly from their attitude toward the future. Fear of the future causes us to lean against and cling to the present, while faith in the future renders us receptive to change. Both the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, they who have achieved much or little can be afraid of the future. When the present seems so perfect that the most we can expect is its even continuation in the future, change can only mean deterioration. Hence men of outstanding achievement and those who live full, happy lives usually set their faces against drastic innovation. The conservatism of invalids and people past middle age stems, too, from fear of the future. They are on the

lookout for signs of decay, and feel that any change is more likely to be for the worse than for the better. The abjectly poor also are without faith in the future. The future seems to them a booby trap buried on the road ahead. One must step gingerly. To change things is to ask for trouble.

As for the hopeful: it does not seem to make any difference who it is that is seized with a wild hope—whether it be an enthusiastic intellectual, a land-hungry farmer, a get-rich-quick speculator, a sober merchant or industrialist, a plain workingman or a noble lord—they all proceed recklessly with the present, wreck it if necessary, and create a new world. There can thus be revolutions by the privileged as well as by the underprivileged. The movement of enclosure in sixteenth and seventeenth century England was a revolution by the rich. The woolen industry rose to high prosperity, and grazing became more profitable than cropping. The landowners drove off their tenants, enclosed the commons and wrought profound changes in the social and economic texture of the country. "The lords and nobles were upsetting the social order, breaking down ancient law and custom, sometimes by means of violence, often by pressure and intimidation."<sup>7</sup> Another English revolution by the rich occurred at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was the Industrial Revolution. The breathtaking potentialities of mechanization set the minds of manufacturers and merchants on fire. They began a revolution "as extreme and radical as ever inflamed the minds of sectarians,"<sup>8</sup> and in a relatively short time these respectable, Godfearing citizens changed the face of England beyond recognition.

When hopes and dreams are loose in the streets, it is well for the timid to lock doors, shutter windows and lie low until the wrath has passed. For there is often a monstrous incongruity between the hopes, however noble and tender, and the action which follows them. It is as if ivied maidens and garlanded youths were to herald the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

6

For men to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change, they must be intensely discontented yet not destitute, and they must have the feeling that by the possession of some potent doctrine, infallible leader or some new technique they have access to a source of irresistible power. They must also have an extravagant conception of the prospects and potentialities of the future. Finally, they must be wholly ignorant of the difficulties involved in their vast undertaking. Experience is a handicap. The men who

started the French Revolution were wholly without political experience. The same is true of the Bolsheviks, Nazis and the revolutionaries in Asia. The experienced man of affairs is a latecomer. He enters the movement when it is already a going concern. It is perhaps the Englishman's political experience that keeps him shy of mass movements.

## II ————— **The Desire for Substitutes**

7

There is a fundamental difference between the appeal of a mass movement and the appeal of a practical organization. The practical organization offers opportunities for self-advancement, and its appeal is mainly to self-interest. On the other hand, a mass movement, particularly in its active, revivalist phase, appeals not to those intent on bolstering and advancing a cherished self, but to those who crave to be rid of an unwanted self. A mass movement attracts and holds a following not because it can satisfy the desire for self-advancement, but because it can satisfy the passion for self-renunciation.

People who see their lives as irremediably spoiled cannot find a worthwhile purpose in self-advancement. The prospect of an individual career cannot stir them to a mighty effort, nor can it evoke in them faith and a single-minded dedication. They look on self-interest as on something tainted and evil; something unclean and unlucky. Anything undertaken under the auspices of the self seems to them foredoomed. Nothing that has its roots and reasons in the self can be good and noble. Their innermost craving is for a new life—a rebirth—or, failing this, a chance to acquire new elements of pride, confidence, hope, a sense of purpose and worth by an identification with a holy cause. An active mass movement offers them opportunities for both. If they join the movement as full converts they are reborn to a new life in its close-knit collective body, or if attracted as sympathizers they find elements of pride, confidence and purpose by identifying themselves with the efforts, achievements and prospects of the movement.

To the frustrated a mass movement offers substitutes either for the whole self or for the elements which make life bearable and which they

cannot evoke out of their individual resources.

It is true that among the early adherents of a mass movement there are also adventurers who join in the hope that the movement will give a spin to their wheel of fortune and whirl them to fame and power. On the other hand, a degree of selfless dedication is sometimes displayed by those who join corporations, orthodox political parties and other practical organizations. Still, the fact remains that a practical concern cannot endure unless it can appeal to and satisfy self-interest, while the vigor and growth of a rising mass movement depend on its capacity to evoke and satisfy the passion for self-renunciation. When a mass movement begins to attract people who are interested in their individual careers, it is a sign that it has passed its vigorous stage; that it is no longer engaged in molding a new world but in possessing and preserving the present. It ceases then to be a movement and becomes an enterprise. According to Hitler, the more "posts and offices a movement has to hand out, the more inferior stuff it will attract, and in the end these political hangers-on overwhelm a successful party in such number that the honest fighter of former days no longer recognizes the old movement. . . . When this happens, the 'mission' of such a movement is done for."<sup>1</sup>

The nature of the complete substitute offered by conversion is discussed in the chapters on self-sacrifice and united action in Part III. Here we shall deal with the partial substitutes.

## 8

Faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves.

## 9

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

## 10

A man is likely to mind his own business when it is worth minding. When it is not, he takes his mind off his own meaningless affairs by

minding other people's business.

This minding of other people's business expresses itself in gossip, snooping and meddling, and also in feverish interest in communal, national and racial affairs. In running away from ourselves we either fall on our neighbor's shoulder or fly at his throat.

## 11

The burning conviction that we have a holy duty toward others is often a way of attaching our drowning selves to a passing raft. What looks like giving a hand is often a holding on for dear life. Take away our holy duties and you leave our lives puny and meaningless. There is no doubt that in exchanging a self-centered for a selfless life we gain enormously in self-esteem. The vanity of the selfless, even those who practice utmost humility, is boundless.

## 12

One of the most potent attractions of a mass movement is its offering of a substitute for individual hope. This attraction is particularly effective in a society imbued with the idea of progress. For in the conception of progress, "tomorrow" looms large, and the frustration resulting from having nothing to look forward to is the more poignant. Hermann Rauschning says of pre-Hitlerian Germany that "The feeling of having come to the end of all things was one of the worst troubles we endured after that lost war."<sup>2</sup> In a modern society people can live without hope only when kept dazed and out of breath by incessant hustling. The despair brought by unemployment comes not only from the threat of destitution, but from the sudden view of a vast nothingness ahead. The unemployed are more likely to follow the peddlers of hope than the handers-out of relief.

Mass movements are usually accused of doping their followers with hope of the future while cheating them of the enjoyment of the present. Yet to the frustrated the present is irremediably spoiled. Comforts and pleasures cannot make it whole. No real content or comfort can ever arise in their minds but from hope.<sup>3</sup>

When our individual interests and prospects do not seem worth living for, we are in desperate need of something apart from us to live for. All forms of dedication, devotion, loyalty and self-surrender are in essence a desperate clinging to something which might give worth and meaning to



our futile, spoiled lives. Hence the embracing of a substitute will necessarily be passionate and extreme. We can have qualified confidence in ourselves, but the faith we have in our nation, religion, race or holy cause has to be extravagant and uncompromising. A substitute embraced in moderation cannot supplant and efface the self we want to forget. We cannot be sure that we have something worth living for unless we are ready to die for it. This readiness to die is evidence to ourselves and others that what we had to take as a substitute for an irrevocably missed or spoiled first choice is indeed the best there ever was.

### III \_\_\_\_\_

## The Interechangeability of Mass Movements

14

When people are ripe for a mass movement, they are usually ripe for any effective movement, and not solely for one with a particular doctrine or program. In pre-Hitlerian Germany it was often a tossup whether a restless youth would join the Communists or the Nazis. In the overcrowded pale of Czarist Russia the simmering Jewish population was ripe both for revolution and Zionism. In the same family, one member would join the revolutionaries and the other the Zionists. Dr. Chaim Weizmann quotes a saying of his mother in those days: "Whatever happens, I shall be well off. If Shemuel [the revolutionary son] is right, we shall all be happy in Russia; and if Chaim [the Zionist] is right, then I shall go to live in Palestine."<sup>1</sup>

This receptivity to all movements does not always cease even after the potential true believer has become the ardent convert of a specific movement. Where mass movements are in violent competition with each other, there are not infrequent instances of converts—even the most zealous—shifting their allegiance from one to the other. A Saul turning into Paul is neither a rarity nor a miracle. In our day, each proselytizing mass movement seems to regard the zealous adherents of its antagonist as its own potential converts. Hitler looked on the German Communists as potential National Socialists: "The *petit bourgeois* Social-Democrat and the trade-union boss will never make a National Socialist, but the Communist always will."<sup>2</sup> Captain Rohm boasted that he could turn the reddest Communist into a

glowing nationalist in four weeks.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Karl Radek looked on the Nazi Brown Shirts (S.A.) as a reserve for future Communist recruits.<sup>4</sup>

Since all mass movements draw their adherents from the same types of humanity and appeal to the same types of mind, it follows: (a) all mass movements are competitive, and the gain of one in adherents is the loss of all the others; (b) all mass movements are interchangeable. One mass movement readily transforms itself into another. A religious movement may develop into a social revolution or a nationalist movement; a social revolution, into militant nationalism or a religious movement; a nationalist movement into a social revolution or a religious movement.

## 15

It is rare for a mass movement to be wholly of one character. Usually it displays some facets of other types of movement, and sometimes it is two or three movements in one. The exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt was a slave revolt, a religious movement and a nationalist movement. The militant nationalism of the Japanese is essentially religious. The French Revolution was a new religion. It had "its dogmas, the sacred principles of the Revolution—*Liberté et sainte égalité*. It had its form of worship, an adaptation of Catholic ceremonial, which was elaborated in connection with civic *fêtes*. It had its saints, the heroes and martyrs of liberty."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the French Revolution was also a nationalist movement. The legislative assembly decreed in 1792 that altars should be raised everywhere bearing the inscription: "the citizen is born, lives, and dies for *la Patrie*."<sup>6</sup>

The religious movements of the Reformation had a revolutionary aspect which expressed itself in peasant uprisings, and were also nationalist movements. Said Luther: "In the eyes of the Italians we Germans are merely low Teutonic swine. They exploit us like charlatans and suck the country to the marrow. Wake up Germany!"<sup>7</sup>

The religious character of the Bolshevik and Nazi revolutions is generally recognized. The hammer and sickle and the swastika are in a class with the cross. The ceremonial of their parades is as the ceremonial of a religious procession. They have articles of faith, saints, martyrs and holy sepulchers. The Bolshevik and Nazi revolutions are also fullblown

nationalist movements. The Nazi revolution had been so from the beginning, while the nationalism of the Bolsheviks was a late development.

Zionism is a nationalist movement and a social revolution. To the orthodox Jew it is also a religious movement. Irish nationalism has a deep religious tinge. The present mass movements in Asia are both nationalist and revolutionary.

## 16

The problem of stopping a mass movement is often a matter of substituting one movement for another. A social revolution can be stopped by promoting a religious or nationalist movement. Thus in countries where Catholicism has recaptured its mass movement spirit, it counteracts the spread of communism. In Japan it was nationalism that canalized all movements of social protest. In our South, the movement of racial solidarity acts as a preventive of social upheaval. A similar situation may be observed among the French in Canada and among the Boers in South Africa.

This method of stopping one movement by substituting another for it is not always without danger, and it does not usually come cheap. It is well for those who hug the present and want to preserve it as it is not to play with mass movements. For it always fares ill with the present when a genuine mass movement is on the march. In prewar Italy and Germany practical businessmen acted in an entirely "logical" manner when they encouraged a Fascist and a Nazi movement in order to stop communism. But in doing so, these practical and logical people promoted their own liquidation.

There are other safer substitutes for a mass movement. In general, any arrangement which either discourages atomistic individualism or facilitates self-forgetting or offers chances for action and new beginnings tends to counteract the rise and spread of mass movements. These subjects are dealt with in later chapters. Here we shall touch upon one curious substitute for mass movements, namely migration.

## 17

Emigration offers some of the things the frustrated hope to find when they join a mass movement, namely, change and a chance for a new beginning. The same types who swell the ranks of a rising mass movement are also likely to avail themselves of a chance to emigrate. Thus migration can serve as a

substitute for a mass movement. It is plausible, for instance, that had the United States and the British Empire welcomed mass migration from Europe after the First World War, there might have been neither a Fascist nor a Nazi revolution. In this country, free and easy migration over a vast continent contributed to our social stability.

However, because of the quality of their human material, mass migrations are fertile ground for the rise of genuine mass movements. It is sometimes difficult to tell where a mass migration ends and a mass movement begins—and which came first. The migration of the Hebrews from Egypt developed into a religious and nationalist movement. The migrations of the barbarians in the declining days of the Roman Empire were more than mere shifts of population. The indications are that the barbarians were relatively few in number, but, once they invaded a country, they were joined by the oppressed and dissatisfied in all walks of life: "it was a social revolution started and masked by a superficial foreign conquest."<sup>8</sup>

Every mass movement is in a sense a migration—a movement toward a promised land; and, when feasible and expedient, an actual migration takes place. This happened in the case of the Puritans, Anabaptists, Mormons, Dukhobors and Zionists. Migration, in the mass, strengthens the spirit and unity of a movement; and whether in the form of foreign conquest, crusade, pilgrimage or settlement of new land it is practiced by most active mass movements.

## **PART TWO —————**

### **The Potential Converts**



# **Preface**

1. The word "frustrated" is not used in this book as a clinical term. It denotes here people who, for one reason or another, feel that their lives are spoiled or wasted.

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7. Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Luther* (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1939), p. 278.
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## PART II

## Chapter IV

1. A mild instance of the combined shaping by the best and worst is to be observed in the case of language. The respectable middle section of a nation sticks to the dictionary. Innovations come from the best —statesmen, poets, writers, scientists, specialists—and from the worst —slang makers.

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2. Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), p. 204.
3. Edward A. Ross, *The Changing Chinese* (New York: Century Company, 1911), p. 92.
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14. Matthew 10:35-37.
15. *Ibid.*, 12:47-49.
16. *Ibid.*, 8:22.
17. *Ibid.*, 10:21.
18. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Chinese, their History and Culture* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), Vol. I, p. 79.
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2. A letter in *Life*, Dec. 23, 1946, written by R. S. Aldrich.

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3. Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), pp. 121-122.
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19. See Section 104.

20. J. B. S. Haldane, *The Inequality of Man* (New York: Famous Books, Inc., 1938), p. 49.

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THE AUTHOR: From 1943 and until his recent retirement, Eric Hoffer was a San Francisco longshoreman. He now spends one day a week as research professor at the University of California at Berkeley. Before that he was a migratory field laborer and a gold miner in the country around Nevada City. He writes of his early life:

"I had no schooling. I was practically blind up to the age of fifteen. When my eyesight came back I was seized with an enormous hunger for the printed word. I read indiscriminately everything within reach—English and German.

"When my father (a cabinet-maker) died I realized that I would have to fend for myself. I knew several things: One, that I didn't want to work in a factory; two, that I couldn't stand being dependent on the good graces of a boss; three, that I was going to stay poor; four, that I had to get out of New York. Logic told me that California was the poor man's country."

Through ten years as a migratory worker he continued to read and scribble. These were the depression years, the Okies and Arkies were the new pioneers and Hoffer was one of them. He had library cards in a dozen towns along the railroad, and when he was in pocket he took a room near a library for concentrated thinking and writing. Out of these experiences came his interest in mass movements. Four books have resulted: *The Temper of Our Time*, *The Ordeal of Change*, *The Passionate State of Mind* and *The True Believer*.

Mr. Hoffer has been interviewed on twelve half-hour National Educational Television programs.

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Richard H. Rovere, *The New Yorker*: "Its theme is political fanaticism, with which it deals severely and brilliantly ... It owes its distinction as a piece of writing to the fact that Hoffer is a born generalizer, with a mind that inclines to the wry epigram and the icy aphorism as naturally as did that of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld ... a work of almost pure cerebration and intuition."

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