

THE *Ayn Rand* LETTER®

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A LAST SURVEY

Part I

This is to tell you, regretfully, that I am discontinuing the publication of The Ayn Rand Letter after these last two issues.

I say "regretfully" because I am sorry to disappoint the readers who have supported this publication, and its predecessors, for so many years. That is why I wanted to make this announcement personally and to tell you my reasons. But first, I want to thank all of you for your interest, your support, and your patience in this last, very difficult year.

My illness was not the cause of my decision, but it did contribute to the cause - by giving me time to reconsider certain issues. There are many aspects of the Letter's publication which I will miss and regret, but, for me personally, the decision to close it, was something of a relief.

There are three reasons for my decision.

1. I had hoped that I could learn to write the Letter fast enough to be able to combine it with working on a book. I have tried it. It took me four years to convince myself that it cannot be done or, at least, that I cannot do it. I thought that it was merely a matter of automatizing the process of writing an article. But my second reason showed me that I was mistaken.

2. My purpose in writing articles was to discuss the application of Objectivism to modern events - i.e., to explain today's trends by identifying their philosophical roots and meaning, and to present the Objectivist alternative. In this respect, reality has proved too cooperative: so many trends are going the way I predicted they would (only more crudely and viciously so) that I find myself in the "untitled" predicament over and over again. Most of you will remember that I wrote "An Untitled Letter" once (January 29, 1973). Its first paragraph read: "The most appropriate title for this discussion would be 'I told you so.' But since that would be in somewhat dubious taste, I shall leave this Letter untitled." I am tired of saying "I told you so" indirectly. It would be better for someone else to observe it.

My criterion in selecting the subjects I discussed was: the subject's philosophical importance, which had to be demonstrable, but not too obvious. Today, the issues are becoming so crudely obvious that those who do not see them, cannot be helped by any discussion. Time and again, I have found that the basic evil behind today's ugliest phenomena is altruism. Well, I told you so. I have been telling you so since We The Living, which was published in 1936. Those who still pretend that they can save freedom and individual rights without challenging altruism, are outside my power

of persuasion (and, I suspect, outside any sort of persuasion, i.e., outside the field of ideas).

Today's disasters are concrete manifestations of one or more of three fundamental abstractions: mysticism, altruism, collectivism. I have discussed such manifestations in many of their current forms, so that the method or pattern of identifying, understanding and opposing them should be clear to you by now. You should be able to recognize them in their next appearance or latest fashion, which will vary endlessly in form, but not in essence. In this respect, I have given you the intellectual ammunition required.

As far as I am concerned, I do not care to go on analyzing and denouncing the same indecencies of the same irrationalism. I enjoy writing only so long as I say something I have not said before. For me, every article has to involve some new identification, big or small, not only new to my readers, but new to me. I cannot bear merely to repeat myself. In the last two years, watching the gray monotony of the culture's disintegration, I saw that the time was approaching when I would have to report on the same kinds of phenomena over and over again. I began to feel as if I would have to become a journalist. Casting no aspersions on that once honorable and always badly needed profession, a journalist is what I most emphatically am not.

This is why I was unable to automatize the process of writing an article. What I was asking of myself was a contradiction: one automatizes the known, one cannot automatize the new.

3. The state of today's culture is so low that I do not care to spend my time watching and discussing it. I am haunted by a quotation from Nietzsche: "It is not my function to be a fly swatter." The evils destroying modern civilization are enormous, but their representatives, agents and carriers are too small to contemplate. This is an illustration of the fact that evil is not "single and big, [it is] many and smutty and small" (The Fountainhead) - or that evil is a default.

Perhaps the last cultural fad one could still argue against was Karl Marx. But Freud - or Rawls? To argue against such persons is to grant them a premise they spend all of their effort disproving: that reason is involved in their theories. (One may discuss those people only long enough to expose the specific nature of their irrationality. Some excellent work is being done in this field, notably by Professor George Walsh in regard to Rawls's "theory of justice.")

You will probably want to ask about my future plans. I intend to return, full time, to my primary work: writing books. I have two books in mind, but I have not yet decided which I will do first.

Now I want to give you a brief indication of the kinds of issues that are coming up, on which you might want to know my views.

1. The Presidential election of 1976. I urge you, as emphatically as I can, not to support the candidacy of Ronald Reagan. I urge you not to work for or advocate his nomination, and not to vote for him. My reasons are as follows: Mr. Reagan is not a champion of capitalism, but a conservative in the worst sense of that word - i.e., an advocate of a mixed economy with government controls slanted in favor of business rather than labor (which, philosophically, is as untenable a position as one could choose - see Fred Kinnaman in Atlas Shrugged, pp. 541-2). This description applies in various degrees to most Republican politicians, but most of them preserve some respect for the rights of the individual. Mr. Reagan does not: he opposes the right to abortion.

Not every wrong idea is an indication of a fundamental philosophical evil in a person's convictions; the anti-abortion stand is such an indication. There is no room for an error of knowledge in this issue and no venal excuse: the anti-abortion stand is horrifying because it is non-venal - because no one has anything to gain from it and, therefore, its motive is pure ill will toward mankind.

Never mind the vicious nonsense of claiming that an embryo has a "right to life." A piece of protoplasm has no rights - and no life in the human sense of the term. One may argue about the later stages of a pregnancy, but the essential issue concerns only the first three months. To equate a potential with an actual, is vicious; to advocate the sacrifice of the latter to the former, is unspeakable.

One method of destroying a concept is by diluting its meaning. Observe that by ascribing rights to the unborn, i.e., the nonliving, the anti-abortionists obliterate the rights of the living: the right of young people to set the course of their own lives. The task of raising a child is a tremendous, lifelong responsibility, which no one should undertake unwittingly or unwillingly. Procreation is not a duty: human beings are not stock-farm animals. For conscientious persons, an unwanted pregnancy is a disaster; to oppose its termination is to advocate sacrifice, not for the sake of anyone's benefit, but for the sake of misery qua misery, for the sake of forbidding happiness and fulfillment to living human beings.

A man who takes it upon himself to prescribe how others should dispose of their own lives - and who seeks to condemn them by law, i.e., by force, to the drudgery of an unchosen, lifelong servitude (which, more often than not, is beyond their economic means or capacity) - such a man has no right to pose as a defender of rights. A man with so little concern or respect for the rights of the individual, cannot and will not be a champion of freedom or of capitalism. (For a full discussion of the issue of birth control, see my article "Of Living Death.")

Some people say that Mr. Reagan does not mean his anti-abortion stand, that he adopted it merely to buy the votes of a certain pressure group. If true, this makes his position more reprehensible still. Even if all modern politicians have to compromise on some issues, a certain fastidiousness is required of them when they are choosing what to give in on and to whom.

If, which is very doubtful, Mr. Reagan gets the Republican nomination, there is only one group of people that could make it necessary to vote for him: the Democrats - by nominating some equivalent of Senator McGovern, such as Senator Kennedy.

In today's political situation, a positive statement about any candidate is valid only at the time it is made, since no one can tell whose policy may change to what or when. Up to the present (and, I hope, in the future), I support the candidacy of President Ford. I disagree with his policies in very many respects, but he deserves great credit for his fight against government spending and for his attempt to cut down on government controls. Obviously, he is an honest man who shows no symptoms of power-lust and no desire to run everyone's life. This is an unusual value in today's politics.

Many things could be said on the negative side, but the major one is President Ford's foreign policy, including détente and the rest of the mess he inherited. The worst heirloom is Mr. Kissinger; but it looks as if, in the last three years, Mr. Kissinger was given enough rope to demonstrate the exact nature of the "practicality" of his, not policy, but range-of-the-moment manipulations.

President Ford's recent cabinet shuffle was not an enlargement, but a shrinking

of Mr. Kissinger's influence. Most of the press, however, misinterpreted it as a Kissinger victory - and this (as well as the trip to China) was probably the reason why President Ford's popularity fell in the polls taken since. People are getting wise to the fact that Metternichean amorality is not a good import on American soil.

(To be continued.)

Ayn Rand

Full refunds for the unexpired portion of all paid subscriptions to The Ayn Rand Letter will be mailed out to our readers within the next two months.

Elayne Kalberman

OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

On Wednesday, January 28, 1976, Ayn Rand will participate in a forum sponsored by the National Town Meeting's Bicentennial Series. The other participant will be Senator Walter F. Mondale. Time: 10:30-11:30 A.M. Place: Eisenhower Theatre, Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C. Topic: "The Limits of Government." Admission to the program is free. (The National Town Meeting forums are broadcast nationwide by National Public Radio. For the date of Miss Rand's appearance on the broadcast, check with your local Public Radio Station.)

On Sunday, April 11, 1976, Ayn Rand will give a talk at The Ford Hall Forum in Boston. The topic will be announced at a later date, in the Forum program. Time: 8 P.M. Place: Alumni Hall, Northeastern University, 360 Huntington Avenue. Advance tickets are available only to members of the Forum. (On past occasions, the auditorium was filled to capacity, and many people had to be turned away. If you plan to attend, we suggest that you arrive at Alumni Hall far in advance of 7:30 P.M., when the doors open.)

Starting on January 23, 1976, the taped lectures of Allan Blumenthal's course, Music: Theory, History and Performance, will be given in Minneapolis. For further information, contact Jane Kettleson at (612) 633-4085 (eves.).

A Dutch edition of Ayn Rand's Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal has just been published in Holland by Uitgeverij Luitingh B.V. Publishers. This is the first translation of a nonfiction work by Miss Rand.

B.W.