

Should We Burn Uncle Sam's Ass?

by CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Should we burn Uncle Sam's ass?

Or will he burn ours? I'll be 50 in August so don't trust me. That's 20 years over 30, and I wonder who the boys under 30 are going to trust when they are over 30? But maybe you ought to trust me a little — I am unemployed, even have a stubble of a goatee, drink each night until early morning, write my little poems and dirty stories, still trying to find the target, maybe missing, getting up at noon for alka seltzer, finding watercolor paintings on the floor along with empty beerbottles and last week's Racing Form. The "Berkeley Tribe" sends me a copy of their paper free each week, so they must know that I am here. Also I drink with anybody and listen. My door is open to Left and Right, black and white and yellow and red and various man, woman, dyke, homo. I do not teach; I learn. I was anti-war when pro-war was a popular fad. I believed that we could have remained out of World War II and the course of history would have been just about as it is now. This is a hell of a statement and, of course, can be disputed. I am still anti-war. Whether a war is against the Left or the Right, I still consider it a war. Among the American intellectuals a "good" war is one that is against the Right; a "bad" war is one against the Left. This is all too easy. The lesson is not to be tricked. If you are going to sacrifice human lives for a Cause, follow it up. Replace it with a new constitution or make the old one work. Say, "We have died. Now this is what we want." The moment an enemy is removed in a war, this creates a void of imbalance and a new enemy forms itself. If you destroy the Left you tend to become the Left; if you destroy the Right you tend to become the Right. It's all a quicksilver, a teeter-totter, and great men have been trapped and fooled by the switching of the balance. Politics, wars, causes — for thousands of years we have ended up with a sack of shit. It's time we learned to think.

Back in the 30's and running right up to World War II there was a strong revolutionary feeling in this country. Franco was about to take over Spain — writers were hooked on the "noble cause" — Hemingway, Koestler who turned around later — in fact, "Darkness at Noon"



was one of the earlier turnings. Then there was Lillian Hellman; Irwin Shaw, the sweetheart of the intellectuals and the darling of "The New Yorker" — see the story, "Sailor Off the Bremen . . . and, of course, there was Steinbeck and Dos Passos — who turned later. Even William Saroyan who said he'd never go to war, got caught up, went, and wrote a very bad novel about it — "The Adventures of Wesley Jackson." There were dozens, hundreds of others. you just weren't a writer worth shit if you weren't for the war. I was a writer who wasn't worth a shit. And, of course, before the war there was a depression. The people, young and old both, used to meet in dark garages and talk about revolution. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was formed to go off to Spain to stop "the rising tide of fascism. Stop it now!" Well, the Brigade was poorly armed and they

screamed at the crowds: "Join the Party! Join the Brigade! We must stop them now! Our lives are at the stake!" Up in San Francisco it was the same. Communist Party dances, well attended. No man could stand aside, they said. Any man who wasn't involved at some level wasn't a thinking and feeling human being. Exciting times for some. But where did they go? What happened to the Left after Hitler was defeated? What happened to Irwin Shaw, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Saroyan, the gang? Well, there was a stupid novel by Steinbeck, "The Moon is Down" and a stupid novel by Hemingway, "Across the River and Into the Trees," and I have no idea if these things were written after or during or just before the war — it was part of the process. Dos Passos gave up. The others found they couldn't write any more. Camus, who justified the war in "Letter to a German Friend," Camus ran around giving speeches at the Academies until the car crash saved him from that kind of life.

My point is that I have heard a similar screaming in the streets once before, and it was wasted. There were betrayals and turnings galore. The people had food in their bellies. The people had made money on the war. Russia the ally became Russia the enemy. Joe Stalin, now that the world was saved, was playing Hitler with his people. Once again — as always — the intellectuals had been fooled. Actuality overcame theory. Human greed, human smallness became history. So-called good men knifed good. Treason. Documents. Tattle-tales. Irwin Shaw saw it and wrote it — his best book, although I no longer remember the title. Joe McCarthy showed up on time. The dirty stockings of Adolph. We had the big ten run out of the motion picture industry. The Right was back in again. But how? Hadn't they been destroyed in World War II? Every man was suspect. "Did you ever belong to the Communist Party? Weren't most of us?" But nobody ever said that. They had their orders from above and like good boys, they obeyed. And now the children of the Jews we saved from the ovens, they are on the Right. They run in their panzers and blitzkriegs and swift air power against the LEFT. It is confusing.

Now once again the intellectuals are crying "Revolution." A bank is burned; I.B.M. bombed, a telephone co. bombed, others . . . Cops are stoned, their cars burned; cops are killed, cops kill — always have. Then we have the big 7 of Chicago and an incredibly senile old crotch of a man for a judge. (By the way, I don't mean the cops are "stoned," I mean that stones are thrown at them.) If Kunstler hadn't warned the kids to lay off in a recent speech, it might have happened. But Kunstler knew it would have been slaughter and would have ended the Revolution right there. He saved them for another day. Like, you say, what is my

POINT? Well, I am a photographer of life, not an activist. But before you decide on a Revolution make sure that you have a good chance to win it — by this, I mean violent overthrow. Before this can be accomplished you must have some revolution within the ranks of the National Guard and the police force. This just isn't happening to any degree. Then you must do it at the polls. And your chances there were taken away with both Kennedies. At this time there are too many people afraid for their jobs, there are too many people buying cars, tv sets, homes, educations on credit. Credit and property and the 8 hour day are great friends of the Establishment. If you must buy things, pay cash, and only buy things of value — no trinkets, no gimmicks. Everything you own must be able to fit inside one suitcase; then your mind might be free. And before you face the troops in the street, DECIDE and KNOW what you are going to replace them with and why. Romantic slogans won't do. Have a definite program, clearly worded, so if you DO win you will have a suitable and decent form of government. For remember, in any movement there are opportunists, power-grabbers, wolves in Revolutionary clothing. These are the men who bring down a Cause. I am for a better world, for my child, for myself, for you, but be careful. A change of power is not a cure. Power to the people is not a cure. Power is not a cure. The whole accent of your thinking must not be how to destroy a government but how to create a better one. Don't be trapped and fooled again. And if you win, beware of a very Authoritarian government with rules that might bind you worse than ever before. I am not exactly a patriot but for all the hell of a lot of injustice, you are still able to express and protest and act within rather wide areas. Tell me, could I write an anti-government piece AFTER you take over? Could I stand in the parks and streets and tell you what I think? I should hope so. But be careful unless you even lose this in some name of Justice. I call for a program so that I may make a choice between you and them, between Revolution and the government that exists. Will you put me to work cutting down sugar cane? That would bore me. Would you build new factories? I've spent my life running away from factories. Would all my writings, my music, my paintings have to be for the good of the State? Could I lay around on park benches and in tiny rooms, drinking wine, dreaming, feeling good and easy? Let me know what you have for me before I burn down a bank. I need more than hippy beads, a beard, an Indian headband, legal grass. What is your program? I am tired of all the dead. Let's not waste them again. If I must face a State Trooper's bayonet I want to know what you will give me if I take it away from him.

Tell me.