



Doomsday on a Small Planet

“May Man Prevail? An Inquiry Into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy,” by Erich Fromm (Doubleday. Hardbound, 264 pp. \$4.50. Paperback, 280 pp. 95¢), a psychologist’s analysis of the cold war, sees paranoid thinking on the national scale as the greatest danger to human survival. Stuart Chase’s latest book is “Live and Let Live.”

By Stuart Chase

TECHNICALLY we are living in an atomic age, emotionally we are still living in the stone age.” To document this melancholy observation, Erich Fromm draws contrast after contrast between what Americans—or Russians, or Chinese—think is happening, and what is really happening. He hopes that an emerging awareness of reality will save us from Doomsday, and he presents some sound suggestions to that end. But it will be a close thing.

If man is to prevail, man will have to do some rapid intellectual maturing, and some concentrated study of human relations. I know of no better text available than this book. If a host of readers could absorb its evidence, and responsible policy-makers act on it, our chance of escaping Doomsday would be markedly improved.

The author is well qualified for his task. He is a distinguished psychiatrist with wide experience and understanding of why we behave like human beings. Brought up in Germany, he is more conversant with the problems of Berlin and Central Europe than most American experts. He has been a close student of Marx and of Communist ideology, and is very much aware how far the Russian and Chinese political economies have each departed from Marxian canons. Finally, and most important, his frame of reference is one race, *homo sapiens*, trying to survive on one small and vulnerable planet. Fromm works on the primary assumption that the human race cannot tolerate a nuclear war. Most of the world’s political leaders verbalize this idea, but their acts often belie it. Their basic rule of action continues to be pre-Hiroshima power politics. I



—Bender, N. Y.

Erich Fromm—“hard and bitter realism.”

believe that an awareness of the stark imperatives of the nuclear age is the key to international understanding. Do we order our concepts about Berlin, Laos, Cuba, in the glaring light of $E=MC^2$, or in the gloom of military and diplomatic principles that disappeared forever in a mushroom cloud sixteen years ago?

Fromm turns his searchlight on practically all the critical areas in the world today. Here I have space to comment on only a few of the more important.

Russia under Khrushchev, says Fromm, is essentially a conservative, state-controlled, managerial society, not a revolutionary system. Its industrial problems are akin to those arising in the Ruhr, Pittsburgh, and other high-energy regions. Mr. K. “neither needs nor wants war,” and seeks an understanding with the United States for ending the cold war and for disarmament. But Mr. K. cannot give up chanting Communist ideology, nor can he turn against China without endangering his own position.

The United States has two choices: we can fight “Communism” as an exercise in demonology, and speed up the arms race until it ends, as it must, in all-out nuclear war. Or we can come to an eventual understanding with Russia for disarmament, for world law, and for joint economic aid to the Hungry World.

Psychological disarmament must accompany if not precede physical dis-

armament. Fromm has some significant observations to make in his professional field. He gives us a clinical account of “paranoid thinking,” a mental ill that has infected both West and East. A paranoid individual imagines that everyone is conspiring against him, even his family. Often he feels they want to do away with him. A whole society can degenerate into this condition, as in the mass fear of witches and devils in the seventeenth century. Most of us now regard Russians as the burghers of Salem regarded the women they called witches—as beings capable of supernatural villainy.

We suffer also from what Fromm calls “projection,” where the evil we fear in ourselves is projected into “the enemy.” Then we feel cleansed of evil and full of virtue. If projection is added to paranoid thinking, as in the cold war, we have “a dangerously explosive psychological mixture,” especially when Russian and Chinese leaders suffer from similar mental abnormalities. (I heard people in Russia last summer talk about “Wall Street” in precisely the way many Americans talk about “The Kremlin.”)

Psychologist Fromm analyzes Herman Kahn, and leaves the latter’s thesis in very bad repair. Kahn’s assertion that the U.S. could recover, after losing a third or more of its population in a nuclear attack, completely neglects a probable mass psychosis worse than that which swept Europe during the Black Death. The bland acceptance of sixty million dead exemplifies, says Fromm, a growing indifference toward life, reminiscent of Hitler’s program of genocide.

Fromm’s discussion of the Berlin crisis is grounded on psychological principles. The West fears that unless Russia is stopped she will overrun Europe and presently the world. Without an armed Germany, we believe that Europe cannot be defended. Then we rationalize away the deeds of the Kaiser and of Hitler and assure ourselves that the Germans are now a democratic, peace-loving, trustworthy people.

The Russians, however, remembering twenty million dead at the hands of the panzer divisions, want no more Hitlers. (This dread I found everywhere I went in Russia.) They fear an armed Germany at least as much as we fear a Soviet march to the Atlantic.

Fromm emphasizes that Germany is now the strongest industrial power in Western Europe, and on the way to becoming the strongest military power. The same elite blocs—the big industrialists and the generals—that were

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Book of the Week

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behind the Kaiser and Hitler are again in control. "It is surprising that Great Britain and the United States seem to have no suspicions; in both countries the fear of Russia [paranoid thinking] has eliminated the fear of a new powerful Germany which could turn against the West just as well as against the East." (Shades of the Hitler-Stalin deal of 1939!)

In the light of this analysis, the first essential for negotiation on Berlin is to assuage the fears of both sides—cast-iron guarantees for no invasion of East into West and vice versa. Negotiation might begin with the West reducing the threat to Russia of an armed Germany in exchange for a guarantee that West Berlin remain a free city. Beyond this lies the whole problem of removing the powder kegs from Central Europe by means of some kind of demilitarized zone. Fromm sees no other course than to begin negotiation on the recognition of the *status quo*.

He not only accepts a neutral bloc of states around the world, but believes we should actively promote neutralism. We should abandon the attempt to line up countries for "our side." The real choice in the Hungry World, he says, is not "capitalism" or "communism"; the choice is what variety of socialism the underlying population will accept. India has one variety. Yugoslavia another, Egypt a third, and so on.

Finally, our author, anchored firmly in the principles of the nuclear age, advocates universal, complete, and controlled disarmament. "Arms control," which proposes in effect a policy of permanent deterrence, is a variety of armament, not disarmament. It may indeed call for an expanded overkill. Permanent deterrence would make Doomsday the more probable as new nations, led by China, acquire nuclear weapons. Instead of having only Russia to watch, the U.S. would have a dozen nations, in all directions, with the danger of accident steadily increasing.

Even if this rickety balance of terror staves off war for a time, "the most pervasive reality in any man's life is the poised missile, the humming data processor connected to it, the waiting radiation counters and seismographs, the over-all technocratic perfection of the mechanism of holocaust."

Disarm or Doomsday is the choice before us. Erich Fromm has written a book of hard and bitter realism. The impractical dreamers are those who think that civilization can survive all-out war in the nuclear age.

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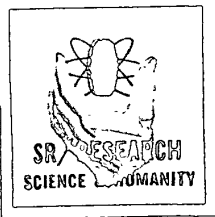
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