



CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

ERICH FROMM: *May Man Prevail?* An Inquiry into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy. 252pp. Allen and Unwin. 21s.

Dr. Fromm is a distinguished psychologist, now resident for many years in the United States. At an earlier stage in his career he wrote with penetration and originality on the psychological background of Nazism and Fascism; and more recently he has attempted to diagnose the current maladies of western society in psychological terms. The present book is inspired by the dangers and disquietudes of the international situation, and is an appeal for "sane" as opposed to "pathological" or "paranoid" thinking about international affairs.

It would be foolish to deny that much of the mutual suspicion which has poisoned relations between East and West during the past decade and a half has an extravagant, or perhaps pathological, quality; and Dr. Fromm makes a good many sensible remarks. His excursions into Soviet history—admittedly elementary and at second hand—are more objective and detached than those to which most American, and some British, writers have accustomed us. It is true that we sometimes allow ourselves to be frightened by what Mr. Khrushchev *might* do, without regard for whether it is anything that he is in the least likely to do. It is also fair to point out that "the Russians are today in some respects where Americans were one hundred years ago"; that what is disquieting about the situation of the West is that "we have no vision of some-

thing new, no aim that truly inspires us"; and that "we must, if not surpass, at least equal the communists, by being wholly and unreservedly with the wave of history, rather than half-heartedly and hesitatingly".

Nevertheless, the inadequacy of a primarily psychological approach soon becomes apparent. In the world of politics conflicts of interest and purpose arise between groups of human beings. Competition for scarce goods grows fierce; some are predominantly interested in acquiring new possessions, others in retaining those acquired in the past. The groups organize themselves for the struggle, arming themselves with those physical and ideological weapons which are the symptom, rather than the source, of the trouble. But it does not help to think of these conflicts simply as something occurring in the minds of human beings, something pathological and even imaginary: they are real conflicts about real differences of interest.

The pacifist argues that nothing justifies violent action to assert or defend one's interests, that such action is self-defeating, and that to surrender is always a lesser evil than to fight. Dr. Fromm does not adopt this position, though it may be implicit in some of his observations. But, short of this extreme position, exhortations to human beings to behave rationally and not emotionally, like exhortations to love one another, are liable to fall on deaf ears.

Anonymus, 1962 Review E. Fromm, *May Man Prevail?*

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