



Attached to the British Embassy in Washington for nearly four years during the war, ISAIAH BERLIN became an almost legendary figure in the capitals of both nations while still in his early thirties. Historian and philosopher, he is today a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of President Franklin Roosevelt's death the BBC invited Mr. Berlin to speak on F.D.R. as Europe saw him. This is what he said, and his words recapture a perspective and an influence which we are in danger of forgetting.

Roosevelt THROUGH EUROPEAN EYES

by ISAIAH BERLIN

I

IT IS AN undeserved honor for me to be allowed to commemorate so great a man; especially as I cannot claim any special connection with him — I never met him, and although I spent more than three years in Washington during the war, I never even saw him. I regret this, for it seems to me that to see and, in particular to hear the voice of someone who has occupied one's imagination for many years, must modify one's impression in some way, and make it more concrete and three dimensional. However, I never did see him, and I heard him only over the radio. Consequently, I must try to convey my impression without the benefit of personal acquaintance, and without, I ought to add, any expert knowledge of American history or of international relations. Nor am I competent to speak of Mr. Roosevelt's domestic or foreign policies, nor of their larger political or economic effects. I shall try to give only a personal impression of the general impact of his personality on my generation.

When I say that some men occupy one's imagination for many years, this is literally true of Mr. Roosevelt's effect on the young men of my own generation in England, and probably in many parts of Europe, and indeed the entire world. If one was young in the thirties and lived in a democracy, then, whatever one's politics, if one had human feelings at all, or the faintest spark of social idealism, or any love of life, one must have felt very much as young men in Continental Europe probably felt after the defeat of Napoleon during the years of the Restoration: that all was dark and quiet, a great reaction was abroad, and little stirred, and nothing resisted.

It all began with the great slump of 1931, which undermined the feeling, perhaps quite baseless, of economic security which a good many young people of the middle classes then had. There followed the iron thirties, of which the English poets of the time

— Auden, Spender, Day Lewis — left a very vivid testament; the dark and lenden thirties to which, alone of all periods in history, no one in Europe wishes to return, unless, indeed, he laments the passing of Fascism. There came Manchuria, Hitler, the hunger marchers, the Abyssinian war, Spain, the peace ballot, the Left Book Club, M. Malraux's political novels, an article by Virginia Woolf, least political of writers, in the *Daily Worker*, the conversions of idealistic young liberals and radicals to Communism or to strong sympathy with it, often for no better reason than that it seemed the only force firm enough and strong enough to resist the Fascist enemy effectively. Such conversions were sometimes followed by visits to Moscow, or by fighting in Spain and death on the battlefield or else bitter and angry disillusionment with Communist practice; or, particularly after the Soviet political trials and purges, by some desperate and unconvincing choice between two evils of that which seemed the lesser.

The most insistent propaganda in those days declared that humanitarianism and liberalism and democratic forces were played out, and that the choice now lay between two bleak extremes, Communism and Fascism — the red or the black. To those who were not carried away by this patter the only light in the darkness was the administration of Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal in the United States. At a time of weakness and mounting despair in the democratic world, Mr. Roosevelt radiated confidence and strength. He was the leader of the democratic world, and even today upon him alone, of all the statesmen of the thirties, no cloud has rested — neither on him nor on the New Deal, which to European eyes still looks a bright chapter in the history of mankind. It was true that his great social experiment was conducted with an isolationist disregard of the outside world, but it

was psychologically intelligible that America, which had come into being in reaction against the follies and evils of a Europe perpetually distraught by religious or national struggles, should try to seek salvation undisturbed by the currents of European life, particularly at a moment when Europe seemed about to collapse into a totalitarian nightmare. Mr. Roosevelt was therefore forgiven by those who found the European situation tragic for pursuing no particular foreign policy — indeed for trying to do, if not without any foreign policy at all, at any rate with a minimum of relationship with the outside world; for that was to some degree part of the American political tradition.

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His internal policy was plainly animated by a humanitarian purpose. After the unbridled individualism of the twenties which had led to economic collapse and widespread misery, he was seeking to establish new rules of social justice. He was trying to do this without forcing his country into some doctrinaire strait jacket, whether of socialism or state capitalism or the kind of new social organization which the Fascist régimes flaunted as the New Order. Social discontent was high in the United States; faith in businessmen as saviors of society had evaporated overnight after the famous Wall Street crash, and Mr. Roosevelt was providing a vast safety valve for pent-up bitterness and indignation, and trying to prevent revolution and construct a régime which should establish greater economic equality, social justice and happiness, above all, human happiness — ideals which were in the best tradition of American life — without altering the basis of freedom and democracy in his country.

This was being done by what, to unsympathetic critics, seemed a haphazard collection of amateurs, college professors, journalists, personal friends, free lances of one kind or another, intellectuals, ideologists — what are nowadays called eggheads — whose very appearance and methods of conducting business or constructing policies irritated the servants of old established government institutions in Washington and tidy-minded conservatives everywhere. Yet it was clear that the very amateurishness of these men, the fact that they were allowed to talk to their hearts' content, to experiment, to indulge in a vast amount of trial and error, that relations were personal and not institutional, bred its own vitality and enthusiasm.

Washington was doubtless full of quarrels, resignations, palace intrigues, perpetual warfare between individuals and groups of individuals, parties, cliques, personal supporters of this or that great captain, which must have maddened sober and responsible officials used to the slower tempo and more normal patterns of administration. As for

bankers and businessmen, the feelings of many of them were past describing; but at this period they were little regarded, since they were considered to have discredited themselves too deeply, and indeed forever.

Over this vast, seething chaos presided a handsome, charming, gay, intelligent, delightful, very audacious man, Mr. Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He was accused of many weaknesses. He had betrayed his class; he was ignorant, unscrupulous, irresponsible. He was ruthless in playing with the lives and careers of individuals. He was surrounded by adventurers, slick opportunists, intriguers. He made conflicting promises, cynically and brazenly, to individuals and groups and representatives of foreign nations. He made up, with his vast and irresistible public charm and his astonishing high spirits, for a lack of virtues considered more important in the leader of the most powerful democracy in the world: the virtues of application, industry, responsibility.

All this was said and some of it may indeed have been just. What attracted his followers were countervailing qualities of a rare and inspiring order. He was large-hearted and possessed wide political horizons, imaginative sweep, understanding of the time in which he lived and of the direction of the great new forces at work in the twentieth century — technological, racial, imperialist, anti-imperialist. He was in favor of life and movement, the promotion of the most generous possible fulfillment of the largest possible number of human wishes, and not in favor of caution and retrenchment and sitting still. Above all, he was absolutely fearless.

He was one of the few statesmen in the twentieth or any other century who seemed to have no fear at all of the future. He believed in his own strength and ability to manage, and to succeed, whatever happened. He believed in the capacity and loyalty of his lieutenants, so that he looked upon the future with a calm eye, as if to say, "Let it come, whatever it may be, it will all be grist to our great mill. We shall turn it all to benefit." It was this, perhaps, more than any other quality, which drew men of very different outlooks to him. In a despondent world which appeared divided between wicked and fatally efficient fanatics marching to destroy, and bewildered populations on the run, unenthusiastic martyrs in a cause they could not define, he believed in his own ability, so long as he was in control, to stem the terrible tide.

He had all the character and energy and skill of the dictators, and he was on our side. He was, in his opinions and public actions, every inch a democrat. All the political and personal and public criticism of him might be true; all the personal defects which his enemies and some of his friends attributed to him might be real; yet as a public figure he was unique. As the skies of Europe grew

darker, in particular after war broke out, he seemed to the poor and the unhappy in Europe a kind of benevolent demigod who alone could and would save them in the end. His moral authority, the degree of confidence which he inspired outside his own country — far more beyond America's frontiers than within them at all times — has no parallel. Perhaps President Wilson in the early days after the end of the First World War, when he drove in triumph through the streets of London and Paris, may have inspired some such feeling; but it disappeared quickly and left behind it a terrible feeling of disenchantment. It was plain even to his enemies that President Roosevelt would not be broken as President Wilson had been. For to his prestige and to his personality he added a degree of political skill — indeed virtuosity — which no American before him had ever possessed. His chance of realizing his wishes was plainly greater; his followers would be less likely to reap bitter disappointment.

Indeed he was very different from Wilson. Indeed they represent two contrasting types of statesmen, in each of which, occasionally, men of compelling stature appear. The first kind of statesman is essentially a man of single principle and fanatical vision. Possessed by his own bright, coherent dream, he usually understands neither people nor events. He has no doubts or hesitations, and by concentration of will-power, by directness and strength, is able to ignore a great deal of what goes on outside him. His very blindness and stubborn self-absorption, in certain situations, enables him to bend events and men to his own fixed pattern. His strength lies in the fact that weak and vacillating human beings, themselves too insecure or confused to be capable of deciding between alternatives, find relief and peace and strength in submitting to the authority of a single leader of superhuman size to whom all issues are clear, and who marches toward his goal looking neither to right nor to left, buoyed up by the violent vision within him.

Such men differ widely in moral and intellectual quality, and, like forces of nature, do both good and harm in the world. To this type belong Garibaldi, Trotsky, Parnell, De Gaulle, perhaps Lenin too — the distinction I am drawing is not a moral one, not one of value but one of type. There are great benefactors, like Wilson, as well as fearful evildoers, like Hitler, within this category.

The other kind of effective statesman is a naturally political being, as the simple hero is often explicitly anti-political and comes to rescue men, at least ostensibly, from the subtleties and frauds of political life. The second type of politician possesses antennae of the greatest possible delicacy, which convey to him, in ways difficult or impossible to analyze, the perpetually changing contours of events and feelings and human activities around him. He is gifted with a peculiar political sense fed on a capacity to take in minute impressions, to

integrate a vast multitude of small, evanescent, un-seizable detail, such as artists possess in relation to their material. Statesmen of this type know what to do and when to do it, if they are to achieve their ends; which themselves are usually not born within some private world of inner thought or introverted feeling, but represent the crystallization of what a large number of their fellow citizens are thinking in some dim, inarticulate, but nevertheless persistent fashion. In virtue of this capacity to judge their material very much as a sculptor knows what can be carved out of wood and what out of marble, and how and when, they resemble doctors who have a natural gift for healing which does not directly depend upon (though it could not exist without) that knowledge of scientific anatomy which can only be learned by observation or experiment or from the experience of others.

This instinctive, or at any rate incommunicable, knowledge of where to look for what one needs, the power of divining where the treasure lies, is something common to many types of genius, to scientists and mathematicians no less than to businessmen and administrators and politicians. Such men, when they are statesmen, are acutely aware of the direction in which the thoughts and feelings of human beings are flowing, of where life presses on them most heavily; and they convey to these human beings a sense of understanding their inner needs, of responding to their own deepest impulses — above all, of being alone capable of organizing the world along lines for which the masses are instinctively groping.

To this type of statesman belong Bismarck and Abraham Lincoln, Lloyd George and Thomas Masaryk, perhaps to some extent Gladstone, and to a minor degree Walpole. Roosevelt was a magnificent virtuoso of this type, and he was the most benevolent as well as the greatest master of his craft in modern times. He really did desire a better life for mankind. The great majorities which he obtained in the elections in the United States during his four terms of office, despite the mounting hostility of the press and perpetual prophecies on its part that he had gone too far and would fail to be re-elected, were ultimately due to an obscure feeling on the part of the majority of the citizens of the United States that he was on their side, that he wished them well, and that he would do something for them. And this feeling gradually spread over the entire civilized world. He became a legendary hero — they themselves did not know quite why — to the indigent and the oppressed far beyond the confines of the English-speaking world.

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As I said before, he was, by some of his opponents, accused of betraying his class; and so he had. When a man who retains the manners, style of life, the

emotional texture and the charm of the old order, of some free aristocratic upbringing, revolts against his milieu and adopts the ideas and aspirations of the new, socially *révolté* class — and adopts them not from motives of expediency but out of genuine moral conviction, or from love of life — inability to remain on the side of what seems to him narrow, corrupt, mean, restrictive — the result is fascinating and moving. This is what makes the figures of such men as Condorcet or Charles James Fox, or some of the Russian, Italian, and Polish revolutionaries in the nineteenth century, so attractive; for all we know, this may have been the secret also of Moses or Pericles or Julius Caesar. It was this gentlemanly quality, together with the fact that they felt him to be deeply committed to their side in the struggle and in favor of their way of life, as well as his open and fearless lack of neutrality in the war against the Nazis and Fascists, that endeared him so deeply to the British people during the war years.

I remember well in London, in November, 1940, how excited most people were about the result of the presidential election in the United States. In theory they need not have worried. Mr. Wilkie, the Republican candidate, had expressed himself forcibly and sincerely as a supporter of the democracies. Yet it was absurd to say that the people of Britain were neutral in their feelings vis-à-vis the two candidates. They felt in their bones that Mr. Roosevelt was their lifelong friend, that he hated the Nazis as deeply as they did, that he wanted democracy and civilization, in the sense in which they believed in it, to prevail, that he knew what he wanted, and that his goal resembled their own ideals more than it did those of all his opponents. They felt that his heart was in the right place, and they did not, therefore, if they gave it a thought, care whether his political appointments were made under the influence of bosses, or for personal reasons, or thoughtlessly; whether his economic doctrines were heretical; whether he had a sufficiently scrupulous regard for the views of the Senate or the House of Representatives, or the prescriptions of the United States Constitution, or the opinions of the Supreme Court. These matters were very remote from them. They knew that he would, to the extent of his enormous energy and ability, see them through.

There is probably no such thing as long-lived mass hypnotism; the masses know what it is that they like, what genuinely appeals to them. What most Germans thought Hitler to be, Hitler, in fact, largely was; and what free men in Europe and in America and in Asia and in Africa and in Australia, and wherever else the rudiments of free political thought stirred at all — what all these felt Roosevelt to be, he, in fact, was. He was the greatest leader of democracy, the greatest champion of social progress, in the twentieth century.

His enemies accused him of plotting to get America into the war. I am not competent to discuss this controversial issue, but it seems to me that the evidence for it is lacking. I think that when he promised to keep America at peace he meant to try as hard as he could to do so, compatibly with helping to promote the victory of the democracies. He must at one period have thought that he could win the war without entering it, and so, at the end of it, be in the unique position, hitherto achieved by no one, of being the arbiter of the world's fate, without needing to placate those bitter forces which involvement in a war inevitably brings about, and which are an obstacle to reason and humanity in the making of the peace.

No doubt he trusted too often in his own magical power of improvisation. Doubtless he made many political mistakes, some of them difficult to remedy. Some say he was disastrously wrong about Stalin and his intentions and the nature of the Soviet state; others, with equal justice, point to his coolness to the Free French movement, his cavalier intentions with regard to the Supreme Court in the United States, his errors about a good many other issues. He irritated his staunchest supporters and most faithful servants because he did not tell them what he was doing; his government was highly personal and it maddened tidy-minded officials and humiliated those who thought that his policy should be conducted in consultation with and through them. His anti-imperialism at times (in Yalta, for example) assumed guilty irresponsible forms. He vastly oversimplified many issues. He overestimated his own capacity to build a new world by the sole use of his own prodigious powers of manipulation in the course of breezily informal dealings with other statesmen on a purely personal basis. All this sometimes exasperated his allies, but when these last bethought them of who most of his ill-wishers were in the United States and in the world outside, and what *their* motives were, their own respect, affection, and loyalty tended to return. No man made more public enemies, yet no man had a right to take greater pride in the quality and the motives of some of those enemies. He could justly call himself the friend of the people, and although his opponents accused him of being a demagogue, this charge seems to me unjust. He did not sacrifice fundamental political principles to a desire to retain power; he did not whip up evil passions merely in order to avenge himself upon those whom he disliked or wished to crush, or because it was an atmosphere in which he found it convenient to operate. He saw to it that his administration was in the *view* of public opinion and drew it on instead of being dragged by it. He made the majority of his fellow citizens prouder to be Americans than they had been before. He raised their status in their own eyes, and in those of the rest of the world. It was an extraordinary transformation of an in-

dividual. Perhaps it was largely brought about by the collapse of his health in the early twenties, and his marvelous triumph over his disabilities. For he began life as a well-born, polite, agreeable, debonair, not particularly gifted young man, something of a prig, liked but not greatly admired by his contemporaries at Groton and at Harvard, a competent Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the First World War; in short, he seemed embarked on the routine career of an American patrician with moderate political ambitions. His illness and the support and encouragement and political qualities of his wife — whose greatness of character and goodness of heart history will duly record — seemed to transfigure his public personality into the strong and beneficent champion who became the father of his people, in an altogether unique fashion.

He was more than this: it is not too much to say that he altered the fundamental concept of government and its obligations to the governed. In this respect Lloyd George was no more than a forerunner. The welfare state, so much denounced, has obviously come to stay: the direct moral responsibility for minimum standards of living and social services which it took for granted, are today accepted almost without a murmur by the most conservative politicians in the Western democracies. The Republican Party in 1952 made no effort to

upset the basic principles — which seemed utopian in the twenties — of Mr. Roosevelt's social legislation.

But Mr. Roosevelt's greatest service to mankind (after ensuring victory against the enemies of freedom) consists in the fact that he showed that it is possible to be politically effective and yet benevolent and civilized: that the fierce left and right wing propaganda of the thirties, according to which the conquest and retention of political power is not compatible with human qualities, but necessarily demands from those who pursue it seriously the sacrifice of their lives upon the altar of despotism — this propaganda, which filled the art and talk of the day, was simply untrue. Mr. Roosevelt's example strengthened democracy everywhere — that is to say, the view that the promotion of social justice and individual liberty does not necessarily mean the end of all efficient government; that power and order are not identical with a strait jacket of doctrine, whether economic or political; that it is possible to reconcile individual liberty and a loose texture of society with the indispensable minimum of organization and authority. And in this belief lies what Mr. Roosevelt's greatest predecessor once described as the last best hope on earth.



THE MURMURING FOUNTAINS, ROME

by JOHN ACKERSON

Bemused, wherever you may turn,
Glitters a lavish waterfall,
'Till rainbows are from swaying fern
To towers of the Aurelian wall;

But best, oh very best of all,
The sea-green mouth and bronzen urn,
Dark cypresses, the bells that call,
Tremble, and one's poor eardrums burn;

Now liltng, gay, now fierce and stern,
Out of the past the tales grow tall;
Your being has but one concern,
By flowing music held in thrall;

Bemused, you seek to rend the pall,
The ancient singers to discern,
As by a slab of Trajan's hall
In cadences the waters yearn.