When shaws be sheen and swards full fair, And leaves both large and long, It is merry walking in the fair forest To hear the small birds' song.

The woodwele sang and would not cease, Sitting upon the spray, So loud he wakened Robin Hood In the greenwood where he lay.

But what exactly was the woodwele? The Oxford Dictionary seems to suggest that it was the woodpecker, which is not a notable songster, and I should be interested to know whether it can be identified with some more probable bird.

Tribune, 28 March 1947

82. Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle

One fallacy left over from the nineteenth century and still influencing our thoughts is the notion that two major wars cannot happen within a few years of one another. The American civil war and the Franco-Prussian war, it is true, occurred almost simultaneously, but they were fought in different continents and by different people. Otherwise the rule seemed to hold good that you can only get people to fight when everyone who remembers what the last war was like is beyond military age. Even the gap between the two world wars—twenty-one years—was large enough to ensure that very few men took part in both of them as common soldiers. Hence the widespread vague belief, or hope, that a third world war could not break out before about 1970, by which time, it is hopefully argued, "all sorts of things may have happened".

As James Burnham points out,¹ the atomic bomb has altered all that. His book is, in effect, a product of atomic weapons: it is a revision, almost an abandonment of his earlier world-picture, in the light of the fact that the great nations are now in a position actually to annihilate one another. When weapons have reached this level of

¹ The Struggle for the World by James Burnham.

deadliness, one cannot take the risk of letting the enemy get his blow in first, so that as soon as *two* hostile nations possess atomic bombs, the explosion will follow almost immediately. In Burnham's opinion, we have perhaps ten years, but more probably only five, before the third world war, which has been raging unofficially ever since 1944, enters its open phase.

No doubt it is not necessary to say what powers this war will be between. Burnham's main aim in writing his book is to urge the United States to seize the initiative and establish what amounts to a world empire now, before Communism swallows the whole of Eurasia. The actual continuity of civilisation, he says, is threatened by the existence of atomic weapons, and there is no safeguard except to make sure that only one nation possesses them. Ideally, atomic energy would be controlled by an international authority, but no such thing exists or is likely to exist for a long time to come, and meanwhile the only serious competitors for world power are the United States and the USSR. However, the struggle is not merely between western democracy and Communism. Burnham's definition of Communism is central to the book, and it is worth stopping to examine it.

He does not accept the now widely-spread belief that Communism is simply Russian imperialism: in its way, it is a genuinely international movement, and the USSR is merely the base, or nucleus, from which it expands, sucking one territory after another into its system. Even if the system covered the whole earth, the real centre of power and government would no doubt continue to be the Eurasian "heartland"; but world Communism does not so much mean conquest by Russia as conquest by a special form of social organisation. Communism is not in the ordinary sense a political movement: it is a world-wide conspiratorial movement for the capture of power. Its aim is to establish everywhere a system similar to that which prevails in Soviet Russia—that is, a system which is technically collectivism but which concentrates all power in a very few hands, is based on forced labour, and eliminates all real or imaginary opponents by means of terrorism. It can expand, even outside the striking range of the Red army, because in every country there are a few people who are its devoted adherents, others, more numerous, who are in some degree deceived, and yet others who will more or less accept Communism so long as it seems to be winning and they are offered no alternative. In every country which they are

unable to dominate, the Communists act as a Fifth Column, working through cover organisations of every kind, playing on working-class aspirations and the ignorance of well-meaning liberals, always with the object of sowing demoralisation against the day when war breaks out. All Communist activities are really directed towards this war. Unless Communism can be forced back upon the defensive, there is no chance of the war being averted, since the inevitability of a "final struggle" is part of the Leninist mythology and is believed in as an article of faith.

After discussing the nature of Communism and of Soviet foreign policy, Burnham examines the strategic situation. "Communism" that is to say, the USSR with its satellite nations and Fifth Columns has enormous advantages in manpower, in natural resources, in the inaccessibility of the Eurasian "heartland", in the quasi-religious appeal of the Communist myth, and above all, perhaps, in the quality of its leadership. The supreme commanders of the Communist movement are men who have no aim in life except to capture power and who are not troubled by scruples nor obliged to take much account of public opinion. They are both experts and fanatics, whereas their opponents are bungling, half-hearted amateurs. On the other hand, "Communism" is technologically backward and suffers from the disadvantage that its mythology is most easily swallowed by people who have not seen Russian rule at close quarters. The United States is relatively weak in manpower and its geographical position is none too strong, but in industrial output and technique it is far ahead of all rivals, and it has potential allies all over the world, especially in western Europe. The greatest handicap of the United States, therefore, is the lack of any definite world-view: if the American people understood their own strength, and also the danger that threatens them, the situation would be retrievable.

Burnham discusses what ought to be done, what could be done, and what probably will be done. He writes off pacifism as a practical remedy. In principle it could solve the world's ills, but since significant numbers of people cannot be induced to adopt it, it can only provide salvation for scattered individuals, not for societies. The real alternatives before the world are domination by Communism and domination by the United States. Obviously the latter is preferable, and the United States must act swiftly and make its purpose unmistakably clear. It must start off by proposing a union—not an alliance, but a complete fusion—with Britain and the British

Dominions, and strive to draw the whole of western Europe into its orbit. It must ruthlessly extirpate Communism within its own borders. It must frankly set itself up as the world's champion against Communism, and conduct unremitting propaganda to the people of the Russian-occupied countries, and still more to the Russian people themselves, making clear to them that not they but their rulers are regarded as the enemy. It must take up the firmest possible attitude towards the USSR, always understanding that a threat or gesture not backed by military force is useless. It must stick by its friends and not make gifts of food and machinery to its enemies. And above all, the United States must have a clear policy. Unless it has a definite, intelligible plan for world organisation, it cannot seize the initiative from Communism. It is on this point that Burnham is most pessimistic. At present, the American people as a whole have no grasp of the world situation, and American foreign policy is weak, unstable and contradictory. It must be so, because—quite apart from the sabotage of "fellow-travellers" and the intrusion of home politics—there is no general, overriding purpose. In outlining a policy for the United States, Burnham says, he is only pointing out what *could* be done. What probably *mil* happen is yet more confusion and vacillation, leading in five or ten years to a war which the United States will enter at grave disadvantage.

That is the general outline of Burnham's argument, though I have slightly rearranged the order in which he presents it. It will be seen that he is demanding, or all but demanding, an immediate preventive war against Russia. True, he does not want the war to happen, and he thinks that it may possibly be prevented if sufficient firmness is shown. Still, the main point of his plan is that only one country should be allowed to possess the atomic bombs: and the Russians. unless crippled in war, are bound to get hold of them sooner or later. It will also be seen that Burnham is largely scrapping his earlier world-picture, and not merely the geographical aspect of it. In The Managerial Revolution, Burnham foretold the rise of three superstates which would be unable to conquer one another and would divide the world between them. Now the super-states have dwindled to two, and, thanks to atomic weapons, neither of them is invincible. But more has changed than that. In The Managerial Revolution it was implied that all three super-states would be very much alike. They would all be totalitarian in structure: that is, they would be collectivist but not democratic, and would be ruled over by a caste

of managers, scientists and bureaucrats who would destroy old-style capitalism and keep the working class permanently in subjection. In other words, something rather like "Communism" would prevail everywhere. In *The Machiavellians*. Burnham somewhat toned down his theory, but continued to insist that politics is only the struggle for power, and that government has to be based on force and fraud. Democracy is unworkable, and in any case the masses do not want it and will not make sacrifices in defence of it. In his present book. however, Burnham is in effect the champion of old-style democracy. There is, he now decides, a great deal in western society that is worth preserving. Managerialism, with its forced labour, deportation, massacres and frame-up trials, is not really the unavoidable next stage in human development, and we must all get together and quell it before it is too late. All the available forces must rally immediately under the banner of anti-Communism. It is essentially a conservative programme, making its appeal to the love of liberty and ordinary decency, but not to international sentiment.

Before criticising Burnham's thesis, there is one thing that must be said. This is that Burnham has intellectual courage, and writes about real issues. He is certain to be denounced as a war-monger for writing this book. Yet if the danger is as acute as he believes, the course he suggests would probably be the right one: and more than this, he avoids the usual hypocritical attitude of "condemning" Russian policy while denying that it could be right in any circumstances to go to war. In international politics, as he realises, you must either be ready to practise appearement indefinitely, or at some point you must be ready to fight. He also sees that appearement is an unreal policy, since a great nation, conscious of its own strength, never really carries it through. All that happens is that sooner or later some demand is felt to be intolerable, and one flounders into a war that might have been avoided by taking a firm attitude earlier. It is not fashionable to say such things nowadays, and Burnham deserves credit for saying them. However, it does not follow that he is right in his main argument. The important thing is the time factor. How much time have we got before the moment of crisis? Burnham, as usual, sees everything in the darkest colours and allows us only five years, or at most ten. If that were right, an American world empire would probably be the only hope. On the other hand, if we have twenty years in which to manoeuvre, there are other and better possibilities which ought not to be abandoned.

Unless the signs are very deceiving, the USSR is preparing for war against the western democracies. Indeed, as Burnham rightly says, the war is already happening in a desultory way. How soon it could break out into full-scale conflict is a difficult question, bringing in all kinds of military, economic and scientific problems on which the ordinary journalist or political observer has no data. But there is one point, very important to Burnham's argument, which can be profitably discussed, and that is the position of the Communist parties and the "fellow-travellers" and the reliance placed on them by Russian strategy.

Burnham lays great stress on the Communist tactic of "infiltration". The Communists and their associates, open and secret, and the liberals who play their game unknowingly, are everywhere. They are in the trade unions, in the armed forces, in the State Department, in the press, in the churches, in cultural organisations, in every kind of league or union or committee with ostensibly progressive aims, seeping into everything like a filter-passing virus. For the moment they spread confusion and disaffection, and presently, when the crisis comes, they will hit out with all their strength. Moreover, a Communist is psychologically quite different from an ordinary human being. According to Burnham:

The true Communist ... is a "dedicated man". He has no life apart from his organisation and his rigidly systematic set of ideas. Everything that he does, everything that he has, family, job, money, belief, friends, talents, life, everything is subordinated to his Communism. He is not a Communist just on election day or at Party headquarters. He is a Communist always. He eats, reads, makes love, thinks, goes to parties, changes residence, laughs, insults, always as a Communist. For him, the world is divided into just two classes of human beings: the Communists, and all the rest.

And again:

The Moscow Show Trials revealed what has always been true of the Communist morality: that it is not merely the material possessions or the life of the individual which must be subordinated, but his reputation, his conscience, his honour, his dignity. He must lie and grovel, cheat and inform and betray, for Communism, as well as die. There is no restraint, no limit.

There are many similar passages. They all sound true enough until one begins applying them to the Communists whom one actually knows. No doubt, Burnham's description of the "true Communist" holds good for a few hundred thousand or a few million fanatical. dehumanised people, mostly inside the USSR, who are the nucleus of the movement. It holds good for Stalin, Molotov, Zhdanov, etc and the more faithful of their agents abroad. But if there is one wellattested fact about the Communist parties of almost all countries, it is the rapid turnover in membership. People drift in, sometimes by scores of thousands at a time, and presently drift out again. In a country like the United States or Britain, a Communist Party consists essentially of an inner ring of completely subservient long-term members, some of whom have salaried jobs; a larger group of industrial workers who are faithful to the Party but do not necessarily grasp its real aims; and a shifting mass of people who are full of zeal to start with, but rapidly cool off. Certainly every effort is made to induce in Communist Party members the totalitarian mentality that Burnham describes. In a few cases this succeeds permanently, in many others temporarily: still, it is possible to meet thinking people who have remained Communists for as much as ten years before resigning or being expelled, and who have not been intellectually crippled by the experience. In principle, the Communist Parties all over the world are quisling organisations, existing for the purpose of espionage and disruption, but they are not necessarily so efficient and dangerous as Burnham makes out. One ought not to think of the Soviet Government as controlling in every country a huge secret army of fanatical warriors, completely devoid of fear or scruples and having no thought except to live and die for the Workers' Fatherland. Indeed, if Stalin really disposed of such a weapon as that, one would be wasting one's time in trying to resist him.

Also, it is not altogether an advantage to a political party to sail under false colours. There is always the danger that its followers may desert it at some moment of crisis when its actions are plainly against the general interest. Let me take an example near at hand. The British Communist Party appears to have given up, at any rate for the time being, the attempt to become a mass party, and to have concentrated instead on capturing key positions, especially in the trade unions. So long as they are not obviously acting as a sectional group, this gives the Communists an influence out of proportion to their numbers. Thus, owing to having won the leadership of several

important unions, a handful of Communist delegates can swing several million votes at a Labour Party conference. But this results from the undemocratic inner working of the Labour Party, which allows a delegate to speak on behalf of millions of people who have barely heard of him and may be in complete disagreement with him. In a parliamentary election, where the individual votes on his own behalf, a Communist candidate can as a rule get almost no support. In the 1945 General Election, the Communist Party won only 100.000 votes in the country as a whole, although in theory it controls several million votes merely inside the trade unions. When public opinion is dormant, a great deal can be achieved by groups of wire-pullers, but in moments of emergency a political party must have a mass following as well. An obvious illustration of this was the failure of the British Communist Party, in spite of much trying, to disrupt the war effort during the period 1939-41. Certainly the Communists are everywhere a serious force, above all in Asia, where they have, or can plausibly present themselves as having, something to offer to the colonial populations. But one should not assume, as Burnham seems to do, that they can draw their followers after them, whatever policy they choose to adopt.

There is also the question of the "fellow-travellers", "cryptos" and sympathisers of various shades who further the aims of the Communists without having any official connection with them. Burnham does not claim that these people are all crooks or conscious traitors, but he does seem to believe that they will always continue in the same strain, even if the world situation deteriorates into open warfare. But after all, the disillusioned "fellow-traveller" is a common figure, like the disillusioned Communist. The important thing to do with these people—and it is extremely difficult, since one has only inferential evidence—is to sort them out and determine which of them is honest and which is not. There is, for instance, a whole group of MPs in the British Parliament (Pritt, Zilliacus, etc) who are commonly nicknamed "the cryptos". They have undoubtedly done a great deal of mischief, especially in confusing public opinion about the nature of the puppet regimes in eastern Europe; but one ought not hurriedly to assume that they are all equally dishonest or even that they all hold the same opinions. Probably some of them are actuated by nothing worse than stupidity. After all, such things have happened before.

There was also the pro-Fascist bias of British Tories and corres-

ponding strata in the United States in the years before 1939. When one saw British Conservative MPs cheering the news that British ships had been bombed by Italian aeroplanes in the service of Franco, it was tempting to believe that these people were actually treacherous to their own country. But when the pinch came, it was found that they were subjectively quite as patriotic as anyone else. They had merely based their opinions on a syllogism which lacked a middle term: Fascism is opposed to Communism: therefore it is on our side. In left-wing circles there is the corresponding syllogism: Communism is opposed to capitalism; therefore it is progressive and democratic. This is stupid, but it can be accepted in good faith by people who will be capable of seeing through it sooner or later. The question is not whether the "cryptos" and "fellow-travellers" advance the interests of the USSR against those of the democracies. Obviously they do so. The real question is, how many of them would continue on the same lines if war were really imminent? For a major war-unless it is a war waged by a few specialists, a Pearl Harbor with atomic bombs—is not possible until the issues have become fairly clear.

I have dwelt on this question of the Communist fifth columns inside the democratic countries, because it is more nearly verifiable than the other questions raised by Burnham's book. About the USSR itself we are reduced to guesswork. We do not know how strong the Russians are, how badly they have been crippled by the war, to what extent their recovery will depend on American aid, how much internal disaffection they have to contend with, or how soon they will get hold of atomic weapons. All we know with certainty is that at present no great country except the United States is physically able to make war, and the United States is not psychologically prepared to do so. At the one point where some kind of evidence is available, Burnham seems to me to overstate his case. After all, that is his besetting sin. He is too fond of apocalyptic visions, too ready to believe that the muddled processes of history will happen suddenly and logically. But suppose he is wrong. Suppose the ship is not sinking, only leaking. Suppose that Communism is not yet strong enough to swallow the world and that the danger of war can be staved off for twenty years or more: then we don't have to accept Burnham's remedy—or, at least, we don't have to accept it immediately and without question.

Burnham's thesis, if accepted, demands certain immediate actions.

One thing that it *appears* to demand is a preventive war in the very near future, while the Americans have atomic bombs and the Russians have not. Even if this inference is unjustified, there can be no doubt about the reactionary nature of other points in Burnham's programme. For instance, writing in 1946, Burnham considers that, for strategic reasons, full independence ought not to be granted to India. This is the kind of decision that sometimes has to be taken under pressure of military necessity, but which is indefensible in any normal circumstances. And again, Burnham is in favour of suppressing the American Communist Party, and of doing the job thoroughly, which would probably mean using the same methods as the Communists, when in power, use against *their* opponents. Now, there are times when it is justifiable to suppress a political party. If you are fighting for your life, and if there is some organisation which is plainly acting on behalf of the enemy, and is strong enough to do harm, then you have got to crush it. But to suppress the Communist Party now, or at any time when it did not unmistakably endanger national survival, would be calamitous. One has only to think of the people who would approve! Burnham claims, perhaps rightly, that when once the American empire had been established, it might be possible to pass on to some more satisfactory kind of world organisation. But the first appeal of his programme must be to conservatives, and if such an empire came into being, the strongest intellectual influence in it would probably be that of the Catholic Church

Meanwhile there is one other solution which is at any rate thinkable, and which Burnham dismisses almost unmentioned. That is, somewhere or other—not in Norway or New Zealand, but over a large area—to make democratic Socialism work. If one could somewhere present the spectacle of economic security without concentration camps, the pretext for the Russian dictatorship would disappear and Communism would lose much of its appeal. But the only feasible area is western Europe plus Africa. The idea of forming this vast territory into a Socialist United States has as yet hardly gained any ground, and the practical and psychological difficulties in the way are enormous. Still, it is *a possible* project if people really wanted it, and if there were ten or twenty years of assured peace in which to bring it about. And since the initiative would have to come in the first place from Britain, the important thing is that this idea should take root among British Socialists. At present, so far as the

idea of a unified Europe has any currency at all, it is associated with Churchill. Here one comes back to one of the main points in Burnham's programme—the fusion of Britain with the United States.

Burnham assumes that the main difficulty in the way of this would be national pride, since Britain would be very much the junior partner. Actually there is not much pride of that kind left, and has not been for many years past. On the whole, anti-American feeling is strongest among those who are also anti-imperialist and anti-military. This is true not only of Communists and "fellow-travellers" who are anxious to make mischief, but of people of goodwill who see that to be tied to America probably means preserving capitalism in Britain. I have several times overheard or taken part in conversations something like this:

"How I hate the Americans! Sometimes they make me feel almost pro-Russian."

"Yes, but they're not actually our enemies. They helped us in 1940, when the Russians were selling oil to the Germans. We can't stand on our own feet much longer, and in the end we may have to choose between knuckling under to Russia or going in with America."

"I refuse to choose. They're just a pair of gangsters."

"Yes, but supposing you had to choose. Suppose there was no other way out, and you had to live under one system or the other. Which would you choose, Russia or America?"

"Oh, well, of course, if one *had* to choose, there's no question about it—America."

Fusion with the United States is widely realised to be one way out of our difficulties. Indeed, we have been almost a dependency of the United States ever since 1940, and our desperate economic plight drives us in this direction all the faster. The union desired by Burnham may happen almost of its own accord, without formal arrangement and with no plan or idea behind it. A noisy but, I believe, very small minority would like Britain to be integrated into the Soviet system. The mass of the British people would never accept this, but the thinking ones among them do not regard the probable alternative—absorption by America—with enthusiasm. Most English leftwingers at present favour a niggling policy of "getting along with Russia" by being strong enough to prevent an attack and weak enough to disarm suspicion. Under this lies the hope that when the Russians become more prosperous, they may become more friendly.

The other way out for Britain, the Socialist United States of Europe, has not as yet much magnetism. And the more the pessimistic worldview of Burnham and others like him prevails, the harder it is for such ideas to take hold.

Burnham offers a plan which would probably work, but which is a *pis aller* and should not be accepted willingly. In the end, the European peoples may have to accept American domination as a way of avoiding domination by Russia, but they ought to realise, while there is yet time, that there are other possibilities. In rather the same way, English Socialists of almost all colours accepted the leadership of Churchill during the war. Granted that they did not want Britain to be defeated, they could hardly help themselves, because effectively there was no one else, and Churchill was preferable to Hitler. But the situation might have been different if the European peoples could have grasped the nature of Fascism about five years earlier. In that case the war, if it happened at all, might have been a different kind of war, fought under different leaders for different ends.

The tendency of writers like Burnham, whose key concept is "realism", is to overrate the part played in human affairs by sheer force. I do not say that he is wrong all the time. He is quite right to insist that gratitude is not a factor in international politics; that even the most high-minded policy is no use unless you can show a practical way of putting it into effect, and that in the affairs of nations and societies, as opposed to individuals, one cannot hope for more than temporary and imperfect solutions. And he is probably right in arguing from this that one cannot apply to politics the same moral code that one practises or tries to practise in private life. But somehow his picture of the world is always slightly distorted. The Managerial Revolution, for instance, seemed to me a good description of what is actually happening in various parts of the world, i.e. the growth of societies neither capitalist nor Socialist, and organised more or less on the lines of a caste system. But Burnham went on to argue that because this was happening, nothing else could happen, and the new, tightly-knit totalitarian state must be stronger than the chaotic democracies. Therefore, among other things, Germany had to win the war. Yet in the event Germany collapsed at least partly because of her totalitarian structure. A more democratic, less efficient country would not have made such errors in politics and strategy, nor would it have aroused such a volume of hatred throughout the world.

Of course, there is more in Burnham's book than the mere proposal for the setting-up of an American empire, and in detail there is much with which one can agree. I think he is mainly right in his account of the way in which Communist propaganda works, and the difficulty of countering it, and he is certainly right in saying that one of the most important problems at this moment is to find a way of speaking to the Russian people over the heads of their rulers. But the central subject of this book, as of almost everything that Burnham writes, is power. Burnham is always fascinated by power, whether he is for it or against it, and he always sees it a little larger than life. First it was Germany that was to swallow the world, then Russia, now perhaps America. When The Managerial Revolution was published, I for one derived the impression that Burnham's sympathies were on the whole with Germany, and at any rate that he was anxious that the United States should not throw good money after bad by coming to the rescue of Britain. The much-discussed essay, "Lenin's Heir", which was a dissertation—a rhapsody, rather—on the strength, cunning and cruelty of Stalin, could be interpreted as expressing either approval or disapproval. I myself took it to be an expression of approval, though of a rather horrified kind.

It now appears that this was wrong. Burnham is not in favour of Stalin or Stalinism, and he has begun to find virtues in the capitalist democracy which he once considered moribund. But the note of fascination is still there. Communism may be wicked, but at any rate it is big: it is a terrible, all-devouring monster which one fights against but which one cannot help admiring. Burnham thinks always in terms of monsters and cataclysms. Hence he does not even mention, or barely mentions, two possibilities which should at least have been discussed in a book of this scope. One is that the Russian regime may become more liberal and less dangerous a generation hence, if war has not broken out in the meantime. Of course, this would not happen with the consent of the ruling clique, but it is thinkable that the mechanics of the situation may bring it about. The other possibility is that the great powers will be simply too frightened of the effects of atomic weapons ever to make use of them. But that would be much too dull for Burnham. Everything must happen suddenly and completely, and the choice must be all or nothing, glory or bust:

It may be that the darkness of great tragedy will bring to a quick

end the short, bright history of the United States-for there is enough truth in the dream of the New World to make the action tragic. The United States is called before the rehearsals are completed. Its strength and promise have not been matured by the wisdom of time and suffering. And the summons is for nothing less than the leadership of the world, for that or nothing. If it is reasonable to expect failure, that is only a measure of how great the triumph could be.

It may be that modern weapons have speeded things up to the point at which Burnham would be right. But if one can judge from the past, even from such huge calamities as the fall of the Roman Empire, history never happens quite so melodramatically as that.

New Leader (New York), 29 March 1947

83. Letter¹ to Victor Gollancz

27B Canonbury Square Islington, Nl 9 April 1947

Dear Gollancz,

I should have written several days earlier, but I have been ill in bed. Very many thanks for your generous action.

> Yours sincerely, Geo. Orwell

84. Letter to Sonia Brownell

Barnhill Isle of Jura Argyllshire 12 April 1947

Dearest Sonia.²

I am handwriting this because my typewriter is downstairs. We arrived OK & without incident vesterday. Richard was as good as

 $^{^1}$ From a typed copy. 2 Sonia Brownell (1918-), editorial secretary of $\it Horizon\,$ 1945-50, who became Orwell's second wife in 1949